

The Splendor of Roman Wall Painting

Umberto Pappalardo

Photographs by
Luciano Romano

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles

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The Domus Romana: Pictorial Decorations and Cultural Values

Umberto Pappalardo

*"Bring me art, bring art inside the walls of my house.
I don't care what it costs."*

Adolf Loos, "The Story of the Poor Little Rich Man"

The houses of every Hellenistic Roman city, be it Antioch, Apameia in Syria, Pella in Macedonia, Rome, Ostia, or Pompeii, were astonishing in the grandiosity of their architectural conception and the sumptuousness of their decoration. Taking advantage of the exceptional liberty we have today to roam through these ancient houses, we can see the entirety of their decorative programs, in both the public and private areas of these residences. We can get a good sense of who these people were and what were their aspirations. Such access would never have been granted in ancient times to anyone outside the family circle. It seems, too, that the bond between the homeowners and the decorations they lived with must have been much deeper among the ancients than is ours today: their mosaics and wall paintings were more difficult to move than the rugs on our floors and the pictures we hang on our walls.

Pompeii and the other cities buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79 are particularly useful to our study of residential decoration because the buildings in larger Roman cities were often refashioned or remodeled on top of the originals, destroying the evidence of their own past. The city of Rome itself has preserved monumental buildings that are tied to the great events of its history, but they rarely have much to say about simpler events and the emotions of everyday life. Because they ceased to exist in an instant, Pompeii and the other cities of Mount Vesuvius offer us both unspoiled examples of decorated houses and a glimpse of daily life that we cannot find anywhere else. In addition, provincial cities generally reflected the ideology and culture of the capital—that is, what was happening there and what its people were thinking. By examining the cities of Vesuvius, then, we can also get some sense of the cultural climate in ancient Rome as a whole.

Modern visitors to these ancient houses seem most amazed by the perfection of their enchanting wall paintings and mosaics, and by the impressive spaces of the buildings, which seem like real palaces. This is the sense we have when we stand, for example, at the entrance to the House of the Silver Wedding, where the atrium, its columns some six meters (20 ft.) high, conveys the impression of monumentality. It is difficult not to compare this splendor to the relative modesty of our own homes and our bare walls, and it is tempting to see the ancient world, therefore, as something delightful. But how delightful was it really? In order to engage this question, we must first define the values that inspired a Roman to build and decorate his house in this manner.

Roman Aspirations

The first thing we note is that every Roman citizen of a certain rank assumed the airs of a king, and it is from this sense of self that all his other social values sprang. The Romans, a people descended from simple shepherds, had embarked upon a series of wars that were primarily defensive and meant to ensure their own security. Somewhat unexpectedly, after their victories over the Carthaginians and Macedonians, they found themselves absolute rulers of the Mediterranean

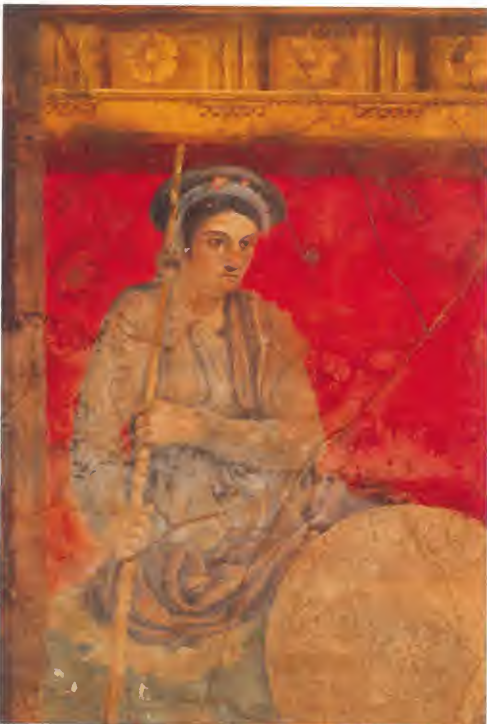


The majestic atrium of the House of the Silver Wedding at Pompeii.

Facing page: Third Style painted wall decoration from the House of Julius Polybius at Pompeii.

Below top: The famous mosaic representing the battle between Alexander the Great and Darius III, king of Persia, originally located in the exedra of the first peristyle of the House of the Faun at Pompeii (Naples, National Archaeological Museum). Detail of Darius and his retreating soldiers.

Below bottom: Painted panel from the House of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale (Naples, National Archaeological Museum). Detail of the historical megalography in the *oecus* (Room H), an allegorical figure representing Macedonia who is characterized by a shield with stars and a Macedonian cap.



world. They became *de facto* heirs of the great empire of Alexander the Great and his successors, the Diadochi or Hellenistic princes.

As a nation sees its power grow, it tries to find a way to legitimize that power. One common justification is that the conquering people are the rightful heirs of a historical tradition, reclaiming a birthright. Thus the Romans, aware of the new power they had acquired and of what they must do to maintain their supremacy, claimed to be the direct descendants of Alexander, adopting the mantle of the Hellenistic princes. This explains, for example, why the owner of the House of the Faun in Pompeii had the exedra in his garden paved with a mosaic copy of the famous Greek painting of the Battle of Issus, in which Alexander defeated Darius III, king of Persia. The mosaic was made in about 120 B.C.; the battle was fought in 333 B.C. For the same reason, the owner of the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, a small town near Pompeii, had copy portraits of Hellenistic rulers painted on the walls of his largest reception room. Images of these kings, who had lived some 300 years earlier, represented, at least allegorically, the conquest of Persia by the Macedonians. The subject had a new timeliness when the paintings were executed in about 40 B.C.: a few years earlier, just before his assassination, Julius Caesar had been preparing an expedition against the Parthians, hoping to return as a new hero who had routed the Asians.

The desire to live like a king was closely tied to a second ideal, namely, the desire to live in a palace. The pacification of the Mediterranean world that resulted from the Second Punic War had allowed trade with the East to flourish. The new wealth this peace generated was eventually and inevitably expressed in private building projects. The Romans had come into contact with the luxurious residences of the Hellenistic world on their adventures in the East and set about to re-create them at home.

The Romans built houses as large as princely palaces, and even larger: a residence like the House of the Faun, the home of the Alexander mosaic, actually had more floor space than the palaces of the kings of Pergamum. The owners then used painting and its capacity to create illusion in order to simulate the walls of sumptuous buildings that in reality did not exist. The Romans commissioned wall paintings to advertise their social ambitions, and even today they remain unsurpassed as a model for the artistic culture of the West, from both a technical and a formal point of view.

The third value we find expressed in Roman houses is also closely tied to the ideals of Hellenistic kingship, and that is a predilection for Greek culture. Why Greek culture? The answer is that the language and culture of Greece were the official language and culture of Alexander's great empire, as well as those of the kingdom of Pergamum and other Hellenistic principalities. Thus Romans sought to surround themselves with representations of Greek myths and statues representing Hellenistic sovereigns, Greek generals, and others. We will explore this point in greater detail later.

The Art and Science of Wall Painting

Pompeii's importance to our understanding of ancient painting is enormous. There is almost nothing left of the masterpieces of Greek painting, and what we know of them we owe to the Romans and their practice of making copies of Greek art, of which the superb pictures in the House of the Tragic Poet at Pompeii are a good example.

It is the majesty and freshness of the paintings themselves, among so many other splendid phenomena, that really impress the visitor to a Roman house. Sometimes it seems as if they had been painted only yesterday rather than two thousand years ago. Indeed one can find fragments of paintings buried in the packed earth of ancient floors whose traces of red and yellow pigments are still bright and intense, even though visitors to the site have trampled on them for decades.

What is the secret of this durability? The exact pictorial technique the Romans used has long been debated, and it has generally been assumed, purely out of intellectual bias, that only a very complex process could have achieved such beauty. Some have suggested that the Romans employed some kind of tempera technique, and the use of encaustic has been widely posited because traces of wax have been found on the painted surfaces. In fact, however, modern restorers applied this wax to keep the walls clean and brilliant.

The secret of the paintings' brilliance lies, as it so often does, in the simplicity of the technique. We are now certain that these works were executed in fresco, one of the oldest pictorial techniques in the world. It is accomplished by spreading a thin layer of fine plaster, the *intonaco*, over a wall surface and then painting on it while it is still damp.

But let us begin at the beginning. Calcareous rocks—chiefly composed of calcium carbonate, a compound of calcium and carbon dioxide—are first selected for their purity and then oven-heated to about a thousand degrees Celsius (1800°F). The heat expels the carbon dioxide from the stone, dispersing it as a gas, at the same time transforming the calcium carbonate into calcium oxide, or quicklime. This process turns the stone a grayish white color. The pieces of stone are then immersed in vats of water, giving off a good deal of heat and producing a lime paste of calcium hydroxide. This paste in turn is mixed with river sand to prepare the *intonaco*. Marble or calcite dust is used in place of the sand for the very final layer of *intonaco* applied to the wall—the *tonachino*—in order to obtain a smooth, polished surface that resembles marble. Pigments, mixed with water, are then applied to this surface while it is still damp. They combine with the *intonaco*, forming a compact layer that fixes the paint firmly to the surface as it dries and giving the colors a special luminosity. In fact carbon dioxide in the air reacts chemically with the lime in the *intonaco*, transforming it once more into calcium carbonate. Lime and marble dust—these ingredients explain the brilliance of Roman painting and the mirror-like polish of the painted walls.

Since the painter had to work while the plaster was still damp, he did not cover the whole room with *intonaco* at once. Instead he laid down only as much as he could keep damp over the period of time, a working day or *giornata*, that he needed to paint it. Work always began on the upper part of the wall and moved downward, and fresco demanded both skill and rapidity of execution.

Roman murals were painted using the fresco technique so precisely described in Vitruvius's treatise on architecture, *De architectura*, an ancient manual for building masters. Warm colors were created by adding colored fats (*boli*) to earth pigments. The painting of a mural was preceded by preparatory drawings made on the *arriccio*, the penultimate layer of plaster on the wall under the *intonaco*, with lines that were incised or painted in red (*sinopia*). After the paintings were finished, the walls were polished with rollers, and then a fatty substance was applied to them by hand. This explains the presence of fingerprints on the painted surface, which is visible when illuminated from an angle.

Those who worked on the frescoes included the master painter and designer (*redemptor*), background painters (*parietarii*), figure painters (*imaginarii*), and workshop assistants who carried out menial tasks like crushing the lime. The paintings are generally anonymous, and it seems clear that a standard inventory of figures was in widespread use.

Not all pigments were well suited to the fresco technique. Natural tones made from earth pigments worked the best. Thus the standard colors were primarily earth tones—reds and yellows were ochers, green a *terre verte*, white a calcium carbonate derived from gesso, blue (*coerulein*) an artificially manufactured mixture, and black (*atramentum*) was made from burnt grapevines mixed with gluten. The most common color was cinnabar red, which has become known, famously, as Pompeian red.

The Four Pompeian Styles

The German scholar August Mau (1840–1909) developed a system to classify the four decorative modes that he identified in the wall paintings at Pompeii. The categories he delineated are still widely known as the four Pompeian styles. In reality, though, these styles were not confined to Pompeii but were widely diffused throughout the Roman world. It is worth running through these four styles briefly, before we consider the question of subject matter and examine the more influential styles in some detail.

The First Style, dated between the fourth and first centuries B.C., used a relatively modest technique. The artists created painted-plaster revetments that imitated the thin veneers of precious marble found on the walls of Hellenistic palaces.



Above top: The *tablinum* and Tuscanic atrium of the House of Sallust at Pompeii. The decorations are First Style imitations of slabs of precious marbles.

Above bottom: Detail of First Style decoration in the House of the Griffins at Rome.



The Second Style, dated between 80 and about 20–15 B.C., saw the introduction of perspective in wall decorations, perhaps under the influence of theater sets. With this technique, the real walls of the room are completely dematerialized. Painters created the illusion that the viewer's space extended beyond the actual walls around him, as if other, more sumptuous architecture were opening up on all sides. In Second Style decoration, paintings are often shown as panels with shutters resting against cornices, as painted papyrus scrolls, or as views seen from windows.

Third Style decoration, by contrast, marks an end of the illusionistic opening up of rooms to fictive spaces around and beyond them. This new style dates between 15 B.C. and A.D. 50, that is, to the reigns of Augustus, Tiberius, and Caligula, and the early rule of Claudius. Decoration in this period becomes flat; the painted wall is commonly divided into three parts both vertically and horizontally, and it is further subdivided into colored squares and rectangles. This same quiet, linear style can be found in the *Ara Pacis*, the great altar Augustus erected in Rome to celebrate the peace he had imposed upon the provinces after years of war. Nor is it absurd to suggest that the Third Style reflects, in private decoration, the sense of order that Augustus restored to the empire.

The Fourth Style, especially at its height, seems to have been linked to the exuberant personality of the emperor Nero. It appeared first in about A.D. 50 as a completely original style invented to decorate the emperor's Domus Aurea. It continued to develop over the rest of the century, although at Pompeii it obviously came to an end when the city was destroyed in A.D. 79. This decorative style, therefore, characterized part of Caligula's reign followed by those of Nero, Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, and Nerva, and the start of Trajan's rule.



Above top: Second Style painted decoration in Room 4 of the House of the Griffins in Rome.

Above bottom: Detail of Second Style painted decoration from the Republican sanctuary at Brescia. Upper part of a wall of the interior hall.

The Subjects and Evolution of Wall Painting at Pompeii

What was the subject matter of these decorative schemes, and how did it change over time? How did the Roman imitation of Hellenistic palaces evolve as the empire gained and lost strength?

The First Style, as we have seen, was mostly free of definitive subjects, concentrating on the imitation of costly materials. By the time of the Second Style, great leaders like Sulla and Caesar were stirring strong political emotions and creating social tensions, which in turn were reflected in art.

Originally Hellenistic, Second Style painting is common even in large public and religious buildings, and in places far distant from Rome itself. We find it, for example, at Brescia in Lombardy in the late-republican sanctuary, which is located on the north side of an area that functioned as the city's forum in Augustan and Flavian times. Several excavation campaigns, beginning in the nineteenth century, have explored this complex, which consisted of four small prostyle temples built on a single podium, accessible by way of a small staircase. The halls or *aulae* were each divided into three aisles by two rows of columns covered with stucco, set parallel to low benches placed along the sides of the room. The paintings here can be dated, stylistically, to about 70 B.C., and they represent the earliest known frescoes in northern Italy. The decorative scheme in the sanctuary at Brescia repeats itself symmetrically and consists of two different compositions, one for the two outer halls and one for the inner ones. In both cases the paintings are consistent and homogeneous from the entrance all the way to the walls that flank the podium. The decoration is a simple motif of simulated ashlar blocks arranged in parallel rows of equal height (isodomic blockwork); these panels imitate slabs of marble and blocks of hewn stone. The decoration in the outer halls consists of a fictive curtain draped over a socle (plinth), and in the middle zone slabs of polychromed marble veneer, arranged vertically (orthostata) between fictive Ionic half-columns. The walls of the inner halls are painted with Ionic half-columns placed on top of plinths; they articulate the space, which has a socle below with a rusticated dado, slabs of marble veneer arranged horizontally (in isodomic courses) creating a polychromed inlay in the middle area, and simple architectural perspectives in the upper zone. The walls of the outer halls are essentially flat and closed, animated only by the draping of the fictive curtains over the socles. The interior halls contain the first signs that walls can be opened up illusionistically: the plinths seem to project forward and the architectural representations to recede slightly. The wall of the west cella in this republican



sanctuary is decorated with a double motif of fictive marble revetment. There are alternating panels of simulated red and purple marble above; they are separated by panels of red and capped by a meander motif. Below is a festooning white curtain that is hung from small rings and decorated with organic and geometric motifs. This rich decoration can be dated, as a whole, to the first phase of an “architectural” style, that is, the Second Pompeian Style; the curtain motif, which is fairly rare, is also found at Pompeii and in two paintings from Sicily.

The significance of the frescoes in Brescia lies in their clear debt to late Hellenistic painting, whose artistic language was widespread in Greece and southern Italy in the first century B.C. It is likely that these paintings were the work of artists trained in those schools, who were summoned to decorate a monument meant to celebrate the extension, in 89 B.C., of the *ius Latii* (that is, qualified Roman citizenship) to the people of Cisalpine Gaul, as well as Sulla’s reorganization of that territory. The local elite probably intended the frescoes to affirm the wholly Hellenistic bias of their social and culture values.

The use of illusionistic painting to decorate walls was an ingenious invention of the Romans used to express their new status with relatively modest expenditure. Nonetheless this illusionism also had an important impact on all later mural painting in the West, as we can see in the architectural background of Raphael’s *School of Athens*. Here the artist painted a huge, coffered barrel vault and beyond it open sky, an expedient to create “supernatural spaces” already mastered in Roman painting.

The Garden

The Romans cultivated another fundamental aspect of the Hellenistic palace, and that is its garden. Small gardens had always existed behind Roman houses. But with the advent of new social aspirations, the ancient *hortus*, whose function had been primarily agricultural, was transformed into a garden of leisure, surrounded by colonnaded porticoes and furnished with pergolas, fountains decorated with mosaics, dining areas (*triclinia*), and statues. The garden became a pleasant, green, living space hidden within the house itself.

The remarkable attachment that Romans—an old race of peasant farmers—had to nature suggests the motivation for creating these interior gardens. The lower areas of Roman walls were almost always decorated with organic motifs, and pergolas appear in the foreshortened architectural vistas in their decorations (for example, in the so-called Room of Pentheus in the House of the Vettii). Sometimes the garden theme expanded to the point where a whole room seemed to be surrounded by a garden, as for example in the House of the Orchard at Pompeii and at Livia’s Prima Porta villa in Rome. In the latter example, and also at the House of Orpheus in Pompeii, a rocky cornice painted at the top of the wall creates the illusion that the room is a grotto and that one is viewing the garden from inside a cave. It is interesting to note in this context that

Left: Wall painting from the House of Livia at Rome. Left wall of Room E with a fictive portico constructed of vegetal shaft columns with rich garlands of fruit and foliage hanging between them.

Right: Wall painting from the House of Livia at Rome. Detail of the left wall of Room E with a yellow frieze imitating a papyrus scroll. Scenes of life along the Nile River are represented on the frieze.

Virgil, in his contemporary *Bucolics*, portrays eminent members of the Roman aristocracy as simple shepherds in natural surroundings.

Eastern and Hellenistic kings often commissioned zoological gardens (*paradeisos*) for their palaces as well, and it was not uncommon for a Roman to imitate this impulse in paint, with exotic animals depicted on the walls of his garden (*peristilium*). These beasts were represented in scenes of the hunt, engaged in ferocious battles among themselves (as in the House of the Ceii), or as animals tamed by Orpheus's song (the House of Orpheus).

First and Second Styles: Greek Mores, Greek Culture

In keeping with the Hellenistic ideals of their class, prominent Romans often decorated their houses like museums; they lived with paintings and sculptures that told the stories of Greek



Fictive windows with representations of scenes from the *Odyssey*, from a villa on the Esquiline Hill at Rome (Vatican, Vatican Library, Stanza delle Nozze Aldobrandine). On the left, *Odysseus at Circe's Court*; on the right, *Odysseus's Companions Turned into Swine*.

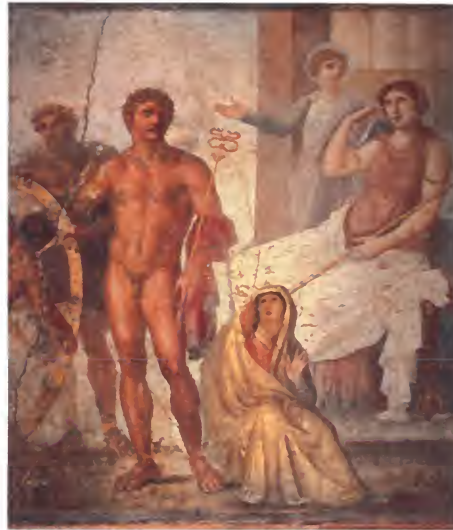
myths and historical events that occurred some 300 years before. This situation makes sense of a certain anomaly in the use of names in the scholarly literature on Roman painting. When reference is made to a Greek original that inspired a Roman work, the Greek names of gods and mythical heroes are used (Zeus, Hera, Apollo, Aphrodite, Herakles, etc.). If, on the other hand, the emphasis is on the Roman copy itself, then the Latin names of its characters are employed (and thus Jupiter, Juno, Phoebus, Venus, Hercules, etc.).

The householders' desire to affect Greek culture is also evident in their picture galleries. The ideals of Hellenistic kingship included patronage of the fine arts, and it is not coincidental that Attalos II, king of Pergamum, collected both original paintings and copies of other works. Because First Style decoration was essentially the imitation of stone building blocks, one could display art specimens either by hanging actual paintings (*pinakes*) on wooden panels from the stucco cornices of the room or by having them copied as mosaic pavement. This is the case with the famous Alexander mosaic depicting the Battle of Issus in the House of the Faun, previously mentioned. Here the copy even reproduces the massive frame—carved with dentils and joined at the corners with floriform metal bosses—that must have hung around the original heavy panel.

In the Second Style, on the other hand, pictorial illusionism allowed original works to be copied directly onto the wall as if they were real panel paintings protected by folding shutters (a device later used to frame Byzantine icons). Pliny the Elder, whose writings provide us with the most extensive information on ancient painting, deprecated this Roman innovation of copying pictures directly onto the wall. One ran the risk, he said, that these pictures would be destroyed along with the rest of the house in case of fire. In addition to paintings, we also find copies of papyrus scrolls incorporated into mural decorations, as in the House of Livia on the

Palatine Hill in Rome. There the yellow background recalls the natural color of the papyrus, and images of a camel and a statue of Isis-Tyche with a cornucopia suggest an Egyptian landscape.

The owner of the House of the Cryptoporticus in Pompeii had an entire gallery of valuable paintings copied onto the walls of the eponymous cryptoporticus, a sumptuous subterranean space with three wings that could be used as sheltered passageways when the weather outside was bad. Its inclusion in a city house, furthermore, brought an element of the country villa to town, an important point because the villa was, for middle-class citizens, the ideal residence. The decoration of this cryptoporticus consists of a socle decorated with a rich meander motif, with large slabs of marble veneer arranged vertically (as orthostata) on the wall above. Simulated herms with crowns create a rhythm across the wall that recalls the villas of the Pisoni and Cicero.



Left: Painted wall decoration from the House of the Vettii at Pompeii. Detail of the “Room of Ixion” with a painting representing *Daedalus and Pasiphae*.

Right: Painted wall decoration from the House of the Vettii at Pompeii. Detail of the “Room of Ixion” with a painting representing *The Punishment of Ixion*.

This wall also incorporates a narrative frieze that recounts the story of the Trojan War from its opening episode—the plague on the Achaeans—to the funerary games organized in honor of Patroclus. It is interesting to note that while the *Iliad* ends with the ransoming of Hector’s corpse, the narrative in the paintings continues with further tales, derived from so-called Cyclic epic poems including the *Aithiopis*, which tell how Penthesilea, queen of the Amazons, came to help the Trojans in their struggle against the Greeks. This suggests that the visual (and probably also the oral) traditions of the Homeric stories followed a course independent of the literary and philological one that focused on a search for the “true Homer.”

Once the visitor has walked through the three wings of the cryptoporticus and is ready to leave, he encounters a representation of Aeneas’s flight from Troy with Anchises, his father, and Ascanius (Iulus), his young son, placed prominently at the center of the wall. This scene, taken from the *Iliu Persis* (fall of Troy), is important because it establishes a connection between the Greek myth and the history of Rome: the fall of Troy and Aeneas’s flight to Latium, the principal themes of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, led to Ascanius’s founding of Alba Longa, the city from which Rome later sprang. This painting also demonstrates that the Romans did not simply copy Greek myths passively but understood how to adapt them for their own purposes and to make them current. It is in this synthesis that the Romans demonstrated their originality.

Sometimes paintings were copied as if they were views seen from a window. This is true, for example, in the decorations of a villa on the Esquiline Hill in Rome, where fictive windows painted in the rooms open onto illusionistic landscapes with scenes taken from the *Odyssey*. The central window reveals Ulysses and Circe in the courtyard of the palace where, as a result of their union, their son Telegonus was born. He would eventually found the city of Tusculum, just as

the descendants of Aeneas would found Rome. Here too the emphasis placed on this story served to confirm the links between the history of Rome and the myth of Troy. The idealized character of the scene is underscored by the fact that one sees it as if from above, despite the fact that the windows themselves are placed some five and a half meters up on the wall. One might also be surprised to find that despite the realism that characterized Roman art, these illusionistic windows never offer views of the everyday life that must have played itself out around the house itself. Instead they look out over landscapes that contain only mythical stories.

Third and Fourth Styles: Idyll and Fantasy

With the advent of the Third Style, the role and positioning of the paintings shifted. Paintings incorporated into Third Style decoration fill the whole of the central panel of the wall. Most common are idyllic landscapes like those we see in the stupendous examples of the villa at Boscotrecase. A shepherd herding a sacrificial goat toward a temple is a frequent subject in these paintings. Many similar scenes recall the bucolic world of Virgil; with the tacit authority of Augustus, the poet had been tasked with bringing the Romans, beleaguered by decades of civil war, closer to religion (*pietas*).

The illusion of space returned to the wall in Fourth Style decoration, but the architecture represented was no longer rationally constructed as it had been in the Second Style. On the contrary it constituted a real play of fantasy—architecture on architecture, curtains, fantastical animals, and so forth—as we see in the stupendous fragment from the Palaestra at Herculaneum that is now in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples.

The themes most often represented in Fourth Style painting involve unhappy love, as in the “Room of Ixion” in the House of the Vettii in Pompeii. There we find the story of Pasiphae, queen of Crete, who became enamored of Zeus. He appeared to her in the form of a bull, and in order to consummate her mad desire, the queen had the sculptor Daedalus create a wooden cow that she used for her union with the bull god; the result of this coupling was the monstrous Minotaur. This scene is juxtaposed with Ixion’s love for Hera; Zeus punished him for trying to seduce his wife by binding him to a wheel that never stopped rolling. A third image represents Dionysus rescuing Ariadne from the island of Naxos, where Theseus had abandoned her. The inclusion of these stories in the same room evidently had a moralizing purpose that one can also find, for example, in the contemporary literary work of Seneca.

Religion and Ritual

As we can see from the paintings, the ancient Romans did not escape the influence of religion. Mystery cults flourished alongside the official Roman religion among the initiated. The cycle in the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii shows a young woman being initiated into the rites of marriage in the presence of the gods Dionysus and Aphrodite. Only by enduring the pain of a beating can she prove to society that she is indeed an adult and old enough to be married.



Many Romans also turned to exotic religions. There were, for example, many followers of the goddess Isis at Pompeii; she was the Egyptian Great Mother who promised happiness and eternal life to all from her redoubt on the fertile banks of the Nile. Her motifs crop up frequently inside the city's houses. These images reveal more than just a taste for the exotic; on the contrary, they seem to document the homeowner's true religious beliefs, as is the case in two *cubicula* in the House of the Orchard.

At Pompeii a temple had been dedicated to Isis from as early as the late second century B.C., and it was one of the first buildings to be renovated after the devastating earthquake of A.D. 62. The inscription above its door tells us that the temple's restoration was financed by Numerius Popidius Celsinus, who was a mere six years old at the time. For this act of charity he was admitted into the citizen's senate, the College of the Decurioni of Pompeii. Evidently the boy's father, a freed slave, could not himself join this political college because of his origins, and he must instead have been preparing his son for a political career. The boy and his father represent a class of *homines novi*—the nouveau riche—who came into prominence during the social upheaval caused by the great destructive earthquake of 62.

Depicted on the walls of the portico of the temple, we see among the priests of the Isis cult a young boy carrying a *situla* (bucket)—the only one of the group without a shaved head. He is most likely the selfsame Numerius Popidius Celsinus, and his haircut, which conforms to a fashion at the time of Nero's reign, suggests that he was a contemporary rather than an idealized figure. The painted acanthus vine, animated by wild beasts, in the portico of the sanctuary is a striking copy of an Alexandrine original, and an identical version of it can be found in the *triclinium* of the House of Siricus. A careful examination of the motif details reveals that the workshop that painted here also decorated the House of the Vettii.

A painting from Herculaneum gives us an idea of the ceremonies that took place in front of these sanctuaries dedicated to Isis. The High Priest, standing at the top of the stairs in the upper part of the scene, displays to the people below the holy water of the Nile, stored in a golden vessel. A choir of the faithful assembles in the portico before the temple to sing hymns to the goddess while ibis roam the grounds in front of them. The priests of the cult, with heads shaved and long tunics, offer sacrifices on the altar.

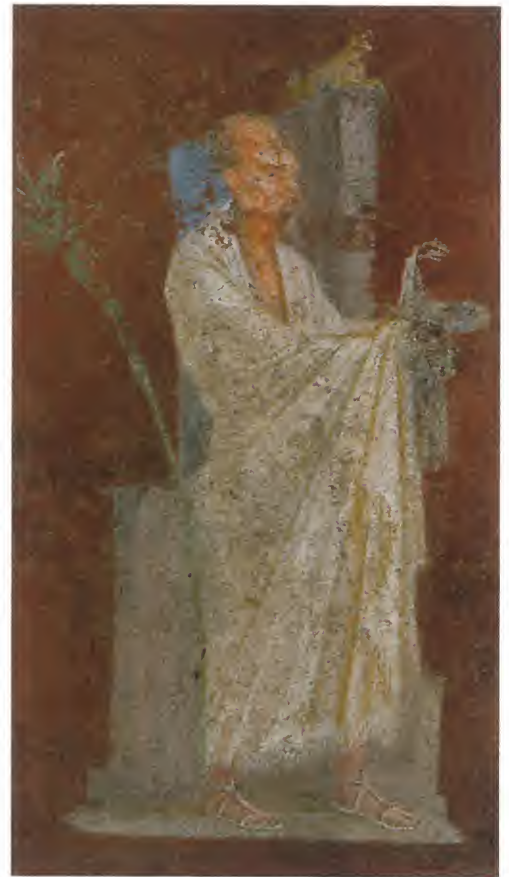
In Pompeii, too, we find a man identified as Loreius Tiburtinus portrayed on a wall of his house as hairless and wearing the long linen tunic of a priest of Isis (*linigerus calvus*). This citizen built a long pool in his garden in the form of a river (*euripus*) to suggest the Nile; he then decorated it with Egyptian statues including ibis, Bes, sphinx, and lions. One can assume, too, that on certain festival days this pond flooded the garden to imitate the flooding of the Nile—the means by which Isis guaranteed the fertility of her land of Egypt.

The Painted "Paradise"

If we understand this desire to create a "paradise" in its historical context, as an expression of the expansionist values of the Roman world, the impulse seems quite rational and comprehensible. Such rational understanding need not diminish our appreciation for the artistic value or the genial inventiveness of these works of art; indeed we simply become alert to the social function of these decorations.

We should also remember that this paradise was not for everyone. At Pompeii, for example, slaves constituted some 40 percent, almost half, of the population. Although generally treated well, slaves and others from the lower tiers of society left few significant traces of themselves behind; they were part of the history of "the people" and not of individuals. Compared to what we know of the rich, we have very little information about how the less fortunate lived. This is in part because the upper stories of the houses where they lodged have collapsed, and the staircases that once led up to their quarters now climb, like Jacob's ladder, up into the empty sky.

We do know, however, that in the second century A.D. about 380 people lived in less-than-comfortable conditions in the four-story tenements that stood near the Capitoline Hill in Rome. These buildings were not so much houses as dormitories for the poor, an urban plebian class. This also explains why public baths became so important in Rome and Pompeii, indeed everywhere in the Roman Empire, since they offered a range of hygienic and health services.



Painted wall decoration in the Temple of Isis at Pompeii. Fourth Style painting with the figure of a priest officiating at the holy rites.

Facing page: Wall painting from the Villa of the Mysteries at Pompeii. Detail of the decoration in Room 5 with a megalography of the initiation mysteries. The painting represents the initiation of a young woman into the mysteries of matrimony according to the cult of Dionysus.



Raphael's frescoes, inspired by the decoration at the Domus Aurea of Nero, in Cardinal Bibbiena's Loggetta at the Vatican Palace (Vatican City).

Many people, however, had to sleep in the streets, including the anonymous souls who scribbled graffiti on the walls of the houses facing the public thoroughfares. One of them, alone and disillusioned, confided his troubles to the wall of the House of Julia Felix in Pompeii: "Coponium fecisti, certaria fecisti, salsamentaria fecisti, aere minutaria fecisti, propola fecisti, laguncularia nunc facis. Si cunnum linxeris, consummaris omnia." (You have been an innkeeper, a ceramist, a butcher, a baker; you have been a farmer and then a trader; you were a peddler and now a wine seller. The only thing left is prostitution and then you will have done everything.)

The Diffusion and Revival of Pompeian Style

When the Romans conquered the lands north of the Alps and established colonies there, they began the complicated process of "Romanizing" these provinces. The construction and then decoration of public buildings was central to this goal.

Roman decorative modes were first introduced in the colonies by Roman artisans. These itinerants went on to found local workshops where Roman motifs were developed and elaborated upon, according to provincial taste. The so-called candelabra motif of the Third Style is a good example of this process. Painted walls in the provinces lack the upper register decorated with architectural acroteria, which were never properly understood in the hinterlands, and the panels below acquired unharmonious proportions (they are either too long or too wide). Furthermore, the band between sections of the wall was enlarged to accommodate large, overloaded, almost baroque candelabra. This decorative scheme had enormous success in Gaul and Germany, where it appeared throughout the second century A.D. The ingenuous adaptation of a Roman motif by others in the ancient world demonstrates, I think, what was structurally speaking the most original (and also the most commonplace and long-lived) invention of the Third Style: the repetitive, modular panels that could be used to decorate both small and very large walls. One might go further and say that the invention of the panel, or better its systematic use, is what makes the Third Style, as opposed to the Second, the first truly Roman innovation in the field of ancient wall decoration.

The Pompeian styles were to reach far beyond the Roman provinces, dramatically influencing the decoration of monumental European buildings. In 1879 Heinrich Schliemann, who discovered Troy, built himself a huge house—the *Ilion Melathron* designed by the architect Ernst Ziller—in the center of Athens, his second wife's hometown. Its walls were decorated with a hybrid of the Pompeian styles. But this was merely a late example of a long-established tradition of borrowing.

The illusionism of the Second Style had already found receptive ground in the sixteenth century. Raphael was a famous antiquarian and the first superintendent of antiquities in Rome. In the Baroque period, interest was focused more heavily on perspectival constructions. Spurred on by the rationalism of the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, aesthetic theory and artistic practice moved away from illusionistic and perspectival painting typical of the Second Style and toward a closer adherence to reality. At the same time a growing historicism prompted a great interest in classical models, attracting attention especially to the flat constructions of the Third and Fourth Style panels. "All'antica" ornamentation became the preferred way to decorate public buildings and official residences. Apparently the high cost of these decorations, and perhaps the austere and museum-like quality of the finished spaces, discouraged middle- and even upper-middle-class homeowners from painting their walls, even though the aristocracy continued to decorate theirs with flowers and garlands.

In the early part of the modern period—from about the middle of the eighteenth through the early nineteenth century—artists had only a partial knowledge of antique models, since they were not allowed to sketch or take notes on objects at Pompeii or in the royal collections at Portici. Official inventories, such as the *Antichità di Ercolano* (Rome, 1789–1807) were more interested in the details than in whole walls. Based on this rather incomplete foundation, painters who worked "in the ancient manner" seem to have taken individual motifs from the larger repertory and recombined them in fantastical ways. The results were sometimes frankly ridiculous. The "copies" tended to be very precise in their details but, because the books gave no exact measurements, the motifs were rendered in gigantic scale on the walls.



The classicizing decoration of the first half of the nineteenth century adhered more closely to the originals. Indeed, Carlo Bonucci (1799–1870), the director of the excavations at Pompeii, lifted the ban on drawing and copying artifacts and paintings. As a result, an increasing number of private inventories, including those by Gell, Mazois, Raoul-Rochette, and Zahn, were published in addition to the official ones (*Gli ornati delle pareti ed i pavimenti . . .*, whose several volumes began to appear in 1796, and the *Real Museo Borbonico* of 1824–57). These new compendia no longer focused solely on details, as did the *Antichità di Ercolano* (1755–92), and they tended therefore to furnish more exhaustive and precise documentation.

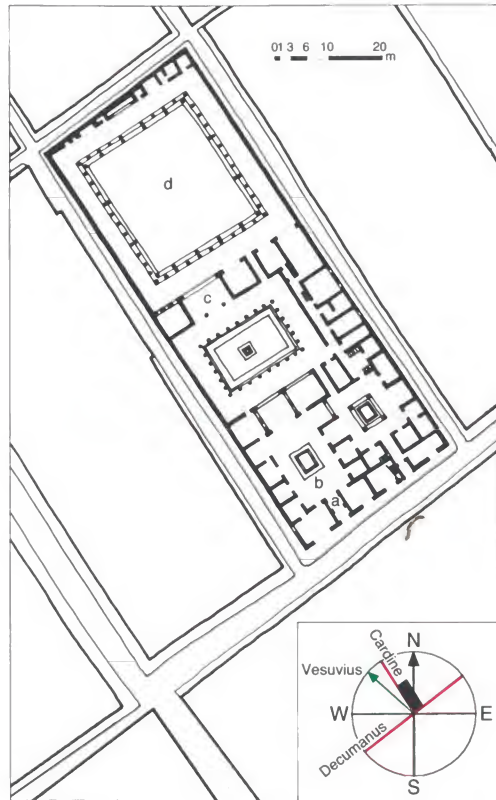
Perhaps the most interesting characteristic of neo-Pompeian decoration is that artists tended to base their decorative schemes on the panels of the Third Style and combine them with the arabesques of the Fourth. At the same time they enlarged the central figures in the panels and—like the provincial Romans—the decorative borders. Even in free decoration, the tendency was always to frame the elements and compose them in panels, as if this were the classical element *par excellence*.

The set designers of modern films set in ancient Rome have followed suit. Their interpretation of classicism was inspired in large part by the systems of the Fourth Style, which were more superficial and therefore more easily assimilated. Cinematography was also much influenced by Ostia and its second century A.D. decorations. However, we owe the invention of the system of panels to the Third Style. This became the most widespread motif in the history of ancient wall painting.

Raphael, *School of Athens* (Vatican City, Vatican Palace, Stanza della Segnatura).

The House of the Faun

POMPEII



The House of the Faun is something of a spectacle in and of itself. It is situated at the center of the city, and its imposing facade faces the Via della Fortuna. A passerby in A.D. 79 who caught a glimpse of its interior must have felt much as we do when we walk by the front of a lovely eighteenth-century residence. When Vesuvius erupted, the house was already at least 200 years old, and the majority of its original decoration was still intact, as its owners must have desired. We see, for example, that the mosaic at the entrance spelled out its cordial welcome—*have*—with an “h” that was no longer used in the more current and correct Latin word *ave*.

The house was one of the largest and most beautiful in Pompeii, and indeed it could almost have provoked envy in the owners of the Hellenistic houses that it took as its models, like those in Pella and Ptolemy in Libya. The House of the Faun comprises some 2,970 square meters (32,000 sq. ft.), and like the royal palace in Pergamum, it occupied an entire city block. The size and the elegance of the building transcended the mediocrity of its Campanian setting. It was built in the Samnite period, in the third or second century B.C., and it has even been suggested that Publius Cornelius, Sulla’s nephew, chose it for his residence after the city was conquered by the Romans, confiscating it from its previous Samnite owners. Gold bracelets in the form of snakes and other valuable jewelry, discovered on site, attest to the wealth of the house’s inhabitants up to the time the city itself was destroyed. The house, which had two atria and two gardens, could accommodate a large household. Its name derives from the small, bronze statue of a faun allegedly discovered at the center of the atrium.

The decoration of the House of the Faun is one of the most important examples of the so-called First Pompeian Style of wall painting. The *fauces* or entrance passageway, for example, has sumptuous First Style decoration with large panels of fictive marble and crushed colored stone. A fictive *lararium* made of painted plaster has been emplaced on a projecting console on the upper level of the wall on each side of this passageway, and its facade imitates that of a tetrastyle temple.

The *atrium Tuscanicum*—that is, one without columns to support the roof—was about sixteen meters (52 ft.) high. The reconstruction of its decoration gives us one wall painted in the First Pompeian Style. It is divided into two levels, with a blind arcade of Ionic half-columns to simulate an upper floor of the sort that one might find in grand reception halls in Hellenistic palaces. The floor of the atrium is made of mortar with a crushed lava aggregate (*lavapesta*), and it has an *impluvium* at its center. The basin that collected the water was decorated with slabs of colored limestone. As one draws nearer, one sees the small statue of the dancing faun or satyr, which stands today at the center of the basin playing what may be a silver double flute. This figure is one of the very few original works of Greek art preserved in this Vesuvian city.

The most prestigious area in the house was the exedra, which was framed by a pair of Corinthian columns *in antis*; their shafts were stuccoed and painted the color of red porphyry. On the floor of the exedra was the famous *Alexander Mosaic*. Discovered in 1831, this enormous mosaic (5.12 × 2.77 m, or about 17 × 9 ft.) was composed of over one million small tiles or *tesserae* (estimates vary from one to four million, depending on the dimensions of the sample surface used in the calculations; for example, 10 versus 50 cm sq, etc.), each of which is about five millimeters (3/16 in.) square. The story represented is probably Alexander the Great’s victory at Issus

Plan of the House of the Faun.

- a. Entryway (*fauces*) with its First Style painted decoration
- b. Atrium (27) with an *impluvium* at the center
- c. Exedra (37) of the first peristyle
- d. Second peristyle (39)

View of the atrium with the *impluvium* decorated with colored limestone. The small statue of the dancing faun, today placed at the center of the pool, was discovered during the excavations around the basin. The original bronze figure is preserved at the National Archaeological Museum at Naples.

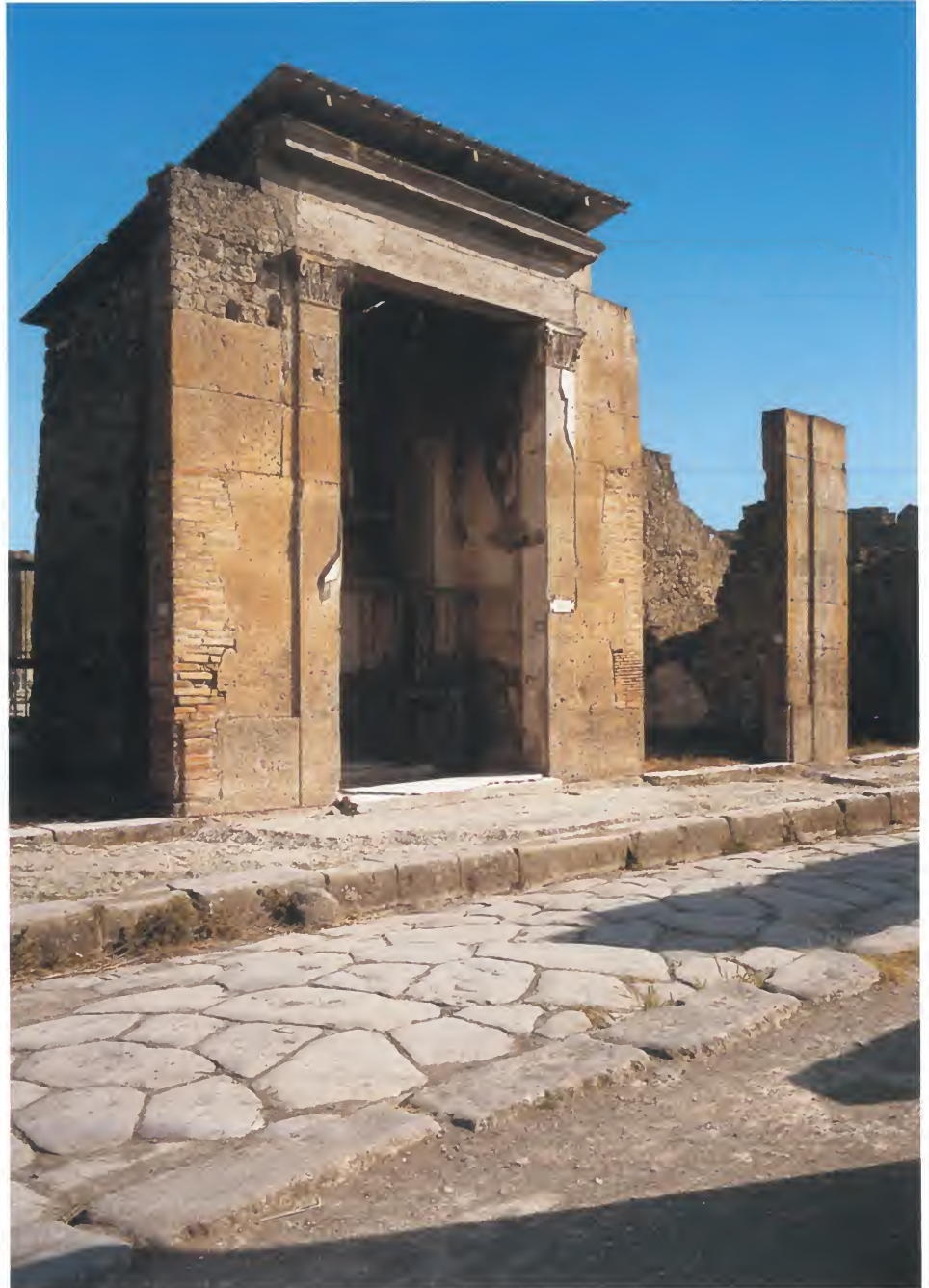


Left: Detail of the *fauces* with its First Style painted decoration imitating slabs of precious marble.

Right: View of the entryway into the house (*fauces*).

in 333 B.C. over Darius III, king of Persia. Made around 120 B.C., the mosaic is a copy of a famous painting executed by Philoxenos at the end of the fourth century B.C., which the Roman author Pliny described in some detail.

Alexander is shown on horseback as he charges threateningly at the chariot of the Persian king. Aware of the threat to the king's life, Darius's charioteer attempts to escape by driving his horses to the right while an officer, a member of the famous "immortal" bodyguards, shields his king and is stabbed by Alexander's lance. The young Macedonian king's face, heroic and serene, is as proud as a god's, in vivid contrast to the Persian monarch whose face betrays very mortal human dismay. The mosaic certainly represents the triumph of Alexander, but it also conveys respectful sympathy for the defeated sovereign.



Why would a historical event that took place some 200 years earlier be represented in a house in Pompeii? What relevance did it have in this context? These questions have been answered in many different ways in the scholarly literature. Recently, however, it has been fruitfully associated with a story reported by the historian Arrian (first–second century A.D.) of an embassy of the Italic peoples that visited Alexander in Babylon, in Mesopotamia, in 324–323 B.C. At that time Alexander had just come back from India, and the Italic embassy wanted to honor the new master of the known world as he was then preparing to conquer the West. It is not impossible to imagine that the Samnite owner of the House of the Faun used the mosaic to make reference to one of his ancestors who may have participated in that expedition.

The threshold in front of the entrance to the exedra, or more precisely in front of the Alexander mosaic, represents a Nilotic landscape that includes a cobra, crocodiles, and hippo-

The famous *Alexander Mosaic*, which represents the victory of Alexander the Great over Darius III, king of Persia, probably at the Battle of Issus. Originally found in the exedra of the first peristyle of the House of the Faun (Naples, National Archaeological Museum).

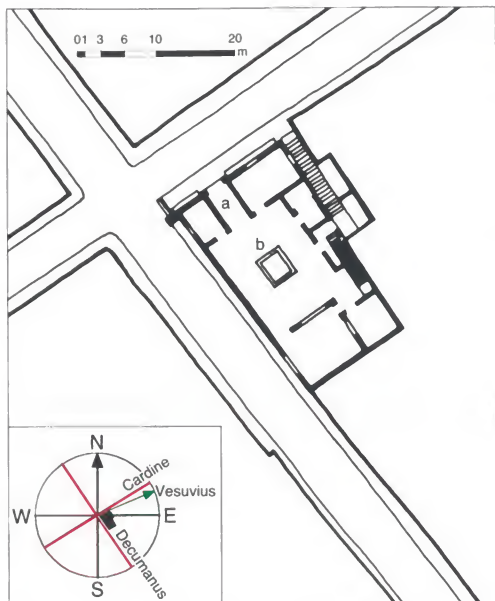


potami, among other creatures. One might well ask what relation there could have been between this exotic landscape and the subject of the large mosaic. The answer may lie in Isis, the great goddess of the Nile, who was responsible for regulating its cyclical floods and who, in the Hellenistic period, was identified with Tyche-Fortuna. Thus the allusive message encoded in the juxtaposition of the images might be as follows: Alexander the Great, king of little Macedonia, was able to defeat Darius, emperor of large Persia, only with the help of the goddess Isis-Fortuna. It is possible, too, that the ancient owner of the House of the Faun was himself a follower of the goddess whose temple in Pompeii had been constructed by Pompey in the second century B.C.

The German artist Tischbein drew the famous poet Goethe seated by the Tomb of Mamia at the Porta Ercolano. Goethe continued to keep abreast of the excavations at Pompeii even many years after his visit to Naples, and he never stopped adding copies of Pompeian art to the collection in his study at Weimar. Indeed just a few days before his death, he added a drawing of the Alexander mosaic, which had been discovered only the year before. Wilhelm Zahn, the founder of the Archaeological Society of Berlin, had made the small watercolor drawing in the poet's honor. Goethe inscribed on it the date—March 10, 1832—and wrote, "Neither our contemporaries nor those who come later will be able accurately to comment correctly on such a masterpiece, and in the end, even after the most careful analysis, they will be forced back to simple and pure admiration." Goethe's prediction continues to be borne out today regarding the efforts to interpret this Hellenistic-Roman masterpiece.

The Samnite House

HERCULANEUM



Plan of the Samnite House

- a. Entryway (*fauces*) with its First Style painted decoration
- b. Tuscanic atrium (A)

Facing page: First Style decoration with a fictive Ionic colonnade on the upper level of the Tuscanic atrium.

In ancient times Herculaneum was a small, seaside city in Campania located about halfway along the coastal road that ran from Naples first to Pompeii and then to Stabia and Nocera. Like Pompeii, which is thirteen kilometers (8 miles) away, it was buried by the eruption of Mount Vesuvius in A.D. 79. Excavations at Herculaneum began in 1738.

A visitor to the site today sees the ancient city at the bottom of a deep pit at the center of the modern town. Originally, however, Herculaneum was a small city with modest walls built on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius and on a promontory overlooking the sea, and its boundaries were marked by two streams. This is just how Sisenna, a Roman historian of the first half of the first century B.C., described the site (4, fr. 53): “Oppidum tumulo in excelso loco propter mare, parvi moenibus, inter duas fluvias infra Vesuvium collocatum.”

This landscape was completely changed, however, first by the explosion in A.D. 79 that spewed ash across the countryside, and then by the lava flows of the 1631 eruption. These natural disasters together raised the level of the ground more than twenty meters (65 ft.) and moved the coastline 450 meters (1,475 ft.) farther out. The excavations, however, confirmed the accuracy of Sisenna’s description, and recently the ancient coastline was discovered just to the southwest of the so-called Suburban Baths.

Yet because of these changes to the local topography, the contemporary visitor enters the excavations by a ramp that connects to the ancient system of streets about halfway down the third *cardine* (north-south axis); the effect is something like coming into a house through a window. To ameliorate this unfortunate impression, a gallery has been excavated in front of the museum building; it faces the original beach near the Suburban Baths and allows the visitor some sense of what the city once looked like from below. From the upper tree-lined avenue that leads from the Corso Ercolano entrance to the south front of the excavations, one can both enjoy a view over the Bay of Naples, which is unchanged since antiquity, and gather a sense of the site as a whole.

About five of the original twelve hectares (29 acres) that composed the area of Herculaneum have been excavated. This ancient city thus had about one-fifth the area of Pompeii, which covered 66 hectares (163 acres). Herculaneum’s population, estimated at about 5,000 inhabitants, was also smaller than that of its neighbor (Pompeii’s population was between 10,000 and 20,000 people).

The excavated portion of the city seems to consist of six independent blocks of housing (*insulae*) separated by a grid of streets that intersect one another at right angles. There are two major streets that run from the northwest to the southeast (*decumani*) and three smaller thoroughfares (*cardines*) that run from the northeast to the southwest. The original boundary of the city, buried today beneath the modern town, is unknown. We can hypothesize, based in part on the drawings made during the Bourbon exploration of the site by means of tunnels, that there was another *decumanus* uphill from the others as well as two more *cardines* to the northwest, in the direction of Naples. In that case, the city may have had a total of sixteen *insulae* or blocks.

The plan of Herculaneum’s streets, a grid system with *decumani* running parallel to the coast and *cardines* perpendicular to them, was more regular than Pompeii’s. Furthermore, the orientation and placement of its buildings reveal its reliance on the orthogonal plan of a Greek city,





and Herculaneum's layout was presumably based on that of nearby Naples, which was founded in the fifth century B.C.

The land on which the city was built sloped rather steeply upward. The upper *decumanus* is 21.5 meters (70 ft.) above sea level, while the edge of the cliff above the water is about 12 meters (40 ft.), and the change in level is thus about 9 meters (30 ft.). The promontory itself was, in antiquity, about 15 meters (49 ft.) above the beach (and one needs to remember that the ancient marina was lower by about 3 m, or 10 ft., with respect to current sea level). The city's elevation explains why its buildings were constructed on different levels and why they were so frequently built on man-made terraces. It also explains the gradual elevation of the sidewalks and the absence of the pedestrian barriers between one sidewalk and the next, which are so common in Pompeii.

Since the city was built against the backdrop of the Bay of Naples, its loveliest and most expensive houses were positioned to enjoy the view from along the edge of the promontory, with their verandas, terraces, and rooms facing the sea. Although they were urban residences, their plans were often those of villas, suggesting that they were appropriate places for passing leisure time in a refined environment.

The Samnite House is certainly the most noble of the houses preserved at Herculaneum. It stands on the fourth *cardine* where it intersects the Decumanus Minor, and its name derives from the period in which it was constructed (second century B.C.). It was built before the Roman era in the city's history, when an Italic people—the Samnites, who were Greek in their language and culture—governed Campania. The present house is smaller than the original due to later modifications and the fact that some of its area was ceded to the houses around it. Still, it preserves better than any other residence in Herculaneum the architecture and decoration typical of the late Samnite period, that is, the time before the Social War (90–88 B.C.). It has a lovely portal with squared tufa capitals of the Corinthian order. The upper balustrade is a later addition.

The house's *fauces* has some of the best-preserved First Style decoration at Herculaneum. The plaster is modeled in relief and painted to simulate smooth slabs of precious marble. The wall is composed of a vertical panel to which the *anta* of the portal is connected, a yellow socle with black marble orthostata above and then two courses of alternating blocks of faux porphyry, green marble, Portasanta, and alabaster. The wall is capped above by a strongly projecting dentil cornice. Graffiti appears on a block to the right; it is written right to left in Oscan letters and says, "Spunes Lopi," a reference, perhaps, to the name of the house's owner. The atrium has corner pilasters with Corinthian capitals, and the pavement is decorated with a scale pattern.

The only part of the original First Style decoration that remains in the Tuscanic atrium is on the upper level, which is accessible by way of a wooden stair on the left. The decorative system here consists of Ionic half-columns that suggest a fictive loggia, which, on the southeast side, actually opens up to become a real portico facing the garden.

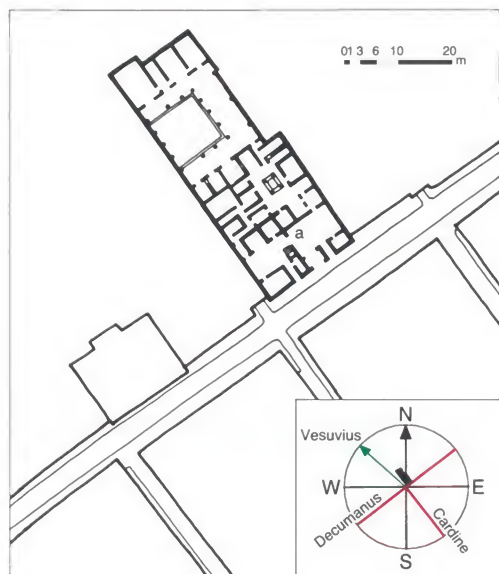
The lower level of the atrium, from the floor to the cornice, was completely renovated in the Fourth Style. Yet regardless of the simplicity of its design, First Style decoration was a strong expression of the desire for both luxury and space that was common throughout Italy at the end of the second century B.C. The pavement is in *opus signinum*, a type of terrazzo made up of broken ceramic fragments in lime mortar.

In the last years of Herculaneum, the owners of the Samnite House must have fallen on hard economic times because, in the middle of the first century A.D., they gave up their garden for the construction of the House of the Grand Portal next door.

Facing page: *Fauces* with First Style decoration that imitates smooth blocks of colored marble.

The House of Julius Polybius

POMPEII



Plan of the House of Julius Polybius

a. Atrium (A) with First Style painted decoration

Facing page: The atrium without an *impluvium* (*testudo*). The First Style painted decoration represents a double door and, in the upper area, a series of pilaster strips.

The House of Julius Polybius has a First Style facade with tapered doors and a dentil cornice above the architrave; the facade is an imposing presence on one of the city's busiest arteries, the Via dell'Abbondanza. The house was damaged by a bomb during World War II and was then almost entirely reconstructed using the original materials. A short poem was discovered scratched into the wall next to its fourth door. It says, "Nothing can last forever. Once the sun extinguishes its splendor, it plunges into the sea. The moon wanes after it is full, and so too the wounds of love become a gentle breathe." (*Nihil durare potest tempore perpetuo. Cum bene sol nutuit redditur oceano. Decrescit Phoebe quae modo plena fuit. Sic venerum feritas saepe fit aura levis.*)

This house varies from the typical Pompeian residence in that it has two atria. One is entirely covered and the other has a *compluvium* and no columns (a Tuscanic atrium). It is decorated in the First, Third, and Fourth Styles. Particularly elegant is the Black Room at the end of the garden; its *Punishment of Dirce* was executed by the same workshop that decorated another noble house, the imperial villa at Porta Marina.

At the time of its burial in volcanic ash, the house was in the process of being restored after sustaining damage in the earthquake of A.D. 62. This explains the presence of a pile of lime in the first atrium. A little before the eruption—and presumably for security reasons, since there were workmen in the house—a group of valuable bronzes was moved into one room; it included a lamp stand (*lampadophoros*) in the form of an ephebe of the "Apollo of Piombino" type and a Spartan krater with a Greek inscription around its edge.

The atrium is unusual in that it does not have an *impluvium* and its pavement slopes toward the outside rather than the middle. It preserves a remarkable amount of its original decoration; indeed it constitutes one of the most complete examples of First Style decoration. The socle with panels of fictive marble is missing, probably a casualty of the earthquake, and it was replaced with Fourth Style decoration (A.D. 79). The middle section of the wall, however, still has its original decoration, which consists of several courses of stucco blocks. The upper zone has a fictive gallery of pilasters, a rendition of real architectural galleries like the one in the Samnite House at Herculaneum. The pilasters flank windows painted with iron grills.

The sophistication of the architectural decoration, which is meant to imitate grandiose Hellenistic palaces, is confirmed by the presence of a painted false door. It is a typical Hellenistic doorway: tapered toward the top, with horizontal bands decorated with bosses. The door consists of four panels, two above and two below, and the upper panels each contain a painted figure.

The peristyle in the back leads to a small orchard. The casts taken from the root pits permit us to identify the ancient plantings. The orchard included an olive, a pear, and a fig tree as well as plants trained to climb the west wall.

The excavation of this house also unearthed thirteen skeletons, perhaps all from the same family. Among them was an old man holding the hand of a pregnant woman. The remains of food were also found, including oysters, eggs, pork, and wild boar. The cupboards contained a numbers of balms with medicinal extracts.



The owner of the house has been identified as the Caius Julius Polybius mentioned in the campaign propaganda scrawled in red both inside and on the facade of the residence. We know little about him except that he belonged to the privileged class of imperial freedmen and that he was a candidate for *duovir* (co-mayor) of the city in the last year of its history. One campaign slogan asked for support because “he bakes good bread” (“panem bonum fert”). This suggests either that the candidate was a man who had brought about economic prosperity, or perhaps, more simply, that like the man who makes good bread he had proved himself to be conscientious. In the latter case he might also have been the owner of the bakery next door and across from the House of the Chaste Lovers.



The House of the Griffins

ROME

Located beneath the *lararium* of the Domus Flavia, the House of the Griffins is the oldest and most interesting of the Republican-era houses yet excavated on the Palatine Hill. In the Republican period, the Palatine was a residential quarter populated by aristocrats and famous people including politicians, generals, and literary figures, as we know from the many textual references to it. The House of the Griffins was excavated in 1912 by Giacomo Boni, who identified it, erroneously, as the house of Lucius Sergius Catilina, called Catiline (d. 62 B.C.). This identification is not credible because the pictorial decoration in the building was much older than the style prevalent in Catiline's lifetime. Giulio Emanuele Rizzo gave the house its current name because of the fantastical stucco animals found in a lunette in Room 3. The two griffins are represented in heraldic fashion flanking an acanthus stump from which slender, flowering tendrils grow. The animals and the stump were modeled in low relief in white stucco, which is set off elegantly against the red color of the wall. The griffins are a motif common in ancient decorative art, and they derive originally from the Near East.

What we see today is only part of the original house; its upper floors were demolished to make way for the massive foundations of the buildings that the emperors Nero and Domitian constructed on top of it. The area of the original house, however, was not much larger than what we have today. There are also still traces of the mosaic floors belonging to the upper story.

The building was constructed using *opus incertum*, but parts of it were rebuilt with a masonry technique that is almost *opus reticulatum*. The painted decorations were laid over the latter masonry, and this allows us to date them to the end of the second and the beginning of the first centuries B.C. The building itself must have been constructed earlier. The paintings in Rooms 4 and 2, the two places where the decoration is the most complete, were detached from the wall and moved to the Antiquarium on the Palatine Hill; recently, however, they have been returned to their original location.

The first room was in large part destroyed by the construction of Domitian's palace above. The one wall that survives allows us to see that the decorative system included a socle, the color of which has now completely vanished, and large orthostata placed above it. The latter are painted as slabs of *breccia corallina*, *giallo antico*, and porphyry, separated by perpendicular green bands edged with red. A short cornice separates the orthostata from a course of alabaster blocks framed in red. A red porphyry epistyle follows, capped by a strongly projecting cornice with three courses of blocks above it. The vault was also decorated but with coffered stucco compartments.

Room 2 was the least damaged by the later construction. Its socle is composed of panels of cubes in perspective separated by column bases. The painted column drums bear images of the bosses used to hoist them up; these were sometimes left on real columns as decorative motifs. The orthostata are composed of alternating panels of red porphyry and variegated slabs of alabaster. The italic Ionic capitals are heavily worked and recall the tufa examples in houses at Pompeii, suggesting that they derive from actual architectural prototypes.

Although it is quite small, Room 4 presents a monumental architectural prospect. The socle is decorated with panels filled with a scale pattern and separated by small pilasters. The orthostata in the middle zone consist of slabs of alabaster that alternate with panels of red, white, and black perspectival cubes that make reference to mosaic patterns. A row of slender



Graphic reproduction of the lunette in Room 3 with the two stucco griffins that give this house its name.





columns stands in the foreground. Their Corinthian capitals are represented with minutely painted detail, and they are almost perfect copies of capitals common in the Hellenistic East in the second century B.C.

Several mosaics are still *in situ*. One, in Room 2, has a small, square panel at its center. It is decorated with colored stone and marble inlay that create the illusion of cubes in perspective. This type of marble inlay, with pieces cut in rhombus and diamond shapes, was known as *scutulatum*, the earliest known example of which was in the Temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, dated 149–146 B.C. Similar examples have been found at Pompeii in the Temple of Apollo and the House of the Faun, and they can be dated to about 120 B.C. This confirms the dating of the House of the Griffins, and the small marble pavement is thus the oldest extant instance of this technique in Rome.

The paintings are the oldest surviving example of the Second Pompeian Style, and they contain for the first time the illusionistic representation of columns standing free of the wall. This colonnade, however, does not yet open the wall up (as do the later examples at the House of Livia); instead it reproduces in painting the ashlar blockwork, modeled in stucco relief, that was characteristic of the older First Style decoration.

Second Style painted decoration in Room 2.

Facing page: One of the two stucco griffins that decorate Room 3.

The Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor

BOSCOREALE (POMPEII)

Axonometric reconstruction of the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor

- a. Sleeping alcove (M) of bedroom
- b. Antechamber (O) of bedroom
- c. *Oecus* (H) with its painted megalography
- d. *Triclinium* (G) with imaginary architecture

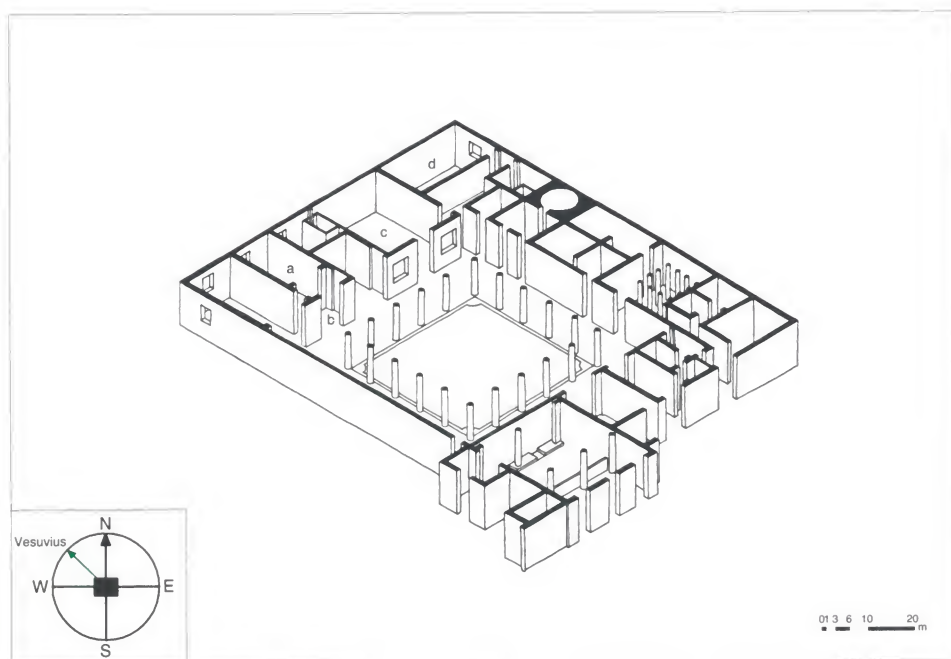
Facing page: The bedroom reconstructed in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. The mosaic floor, bed, and footstool come from later Roman villas.

Boscureale is located on the slopes of Mount Vesuvius, to the north of Pompeii. It is sometimes identified as the *Pagus Augustus Felix Suburbanus*.

Several paintings from a villa at Boscureale are today the pride of the Metropolitan Museum in New York. They were excavated on the Vona estate by private interests in about 1900, at a time before there were national laws to protect such treasures. Following excavation, the paintings were divided up and sold. The result is that the wall paintings from this villa are today found in various museums including those in New York, Naples, Brussels, Mariemont, and Amsterdam.

The name of the villa's purported owner, Publius Fannius Synistor, comes from an inscription on a metal vase, whereas a seal, also in the Metropolitan Museum, gives the name of its last titleholder as one L. Herennius Florus. In any case, the villa belonged to very wealthy people and it was decorated around the middle of the first century B.C., perhaps about 40–30 B.C., with stupendous paintings in the architectural Second Style, similar to those at the Villa of the Mysteries. The paintings represent an extraordinary example of the ornamental possibilities of the Second Style, depicting grandiose scenographic ensembles enriched with sumptuous real objects: gilded columns, silver vessels, glass cups, and so on.

The most highly decorated rooms were those on the north side of the courtyard. A *cubiculum*, or bedroom, has views of a city and the surrounding countryside; the *oecus* or hall (Room H), which lies on axis with the villa's principal entrance, is decorated with a painted megalography; and a dining room (Room G) is decorated with architectural scenes.





Painted decoration on the rear wall of the sleeping alcove (M) in bedroom. *Garden with a Grotto and a Pergola; Landscape on a Yellow Ground* (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

Facing page: Architectural scene on the west wall of the antechamber (O) of the bedroom (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art).



The *cubiculum* follows the normal practice of separating the bed alcove from the antechamber. This division is underscored by a change in the type of ceiling over each space and by varying compositions in the floor mosaics and the wall paintings. In this case, the bed alcove is separated from the antechamber by a white pilaster. The former has a landscape on its rear wall. It shows a fountain inside a grotto, with a pergola on the rocks above (a monochromatic landscape was unfortunately disrupted by the window). The lateral walls were painted with sanctuaries that featured central *tholoi*, incense burners, and vases in the foreground. The walls of the antechamber were decorated with architectural scenes divided into three sections by a pair of Corinthian columns, their shafts decorated with golden tendrils and encrusted with faux gemstones (one may fruitfully compare them with the decoration in the dining room at Oplontis). The central panel shows a walled enclosure with an entrance leading into a sanctuary. There are benches with *hydriae* on either side of the little gate; in front of it stands a cylindrical altar. Beyond the gate we can see a *sacellum* with a statue of Artemis standing inside. The architrave is decorated with garlands and a mask. The lateral panels are painted with two symmetrical views of a city and a port below it, terraced houses, and projecting balconies. These views offer us valuable information about what urban architecture looked like in the Hellenistic-Roman period.

The decoration of the *triclinium* (Room G) is among the most typical of the Second Style. Subdivided into three panels, the scene represents the *propylaeum* of a building with a colonnaded



Painted decoration of the *triclinium* (G) with a representation of the *propylaeum* of a religious sanctuary (Naples, National Archaeological Museum).

portico on the interior. The central element of the composition, framed by two Ionic columns wrapped with tendrils and standing on square podia, is a two-leaf paneled door with a hunting scene against a black ground above, just like in Macedonian tombs. There is a hanging lamp with a figure of Eros above the little curved pediment and a lowered curtain; it is probably an indication that the temple inside was dedicated to Aphrodite, the mother of Eros. Flanking the door and still in the foreground, the portico continues with two more Corinthian columns on square bases. The rear wall is a smooth red partition enlivened above by a course of white stone blocks between two green and violet string-courses. A cornice runs above with corbels in the form of bacchants acting as caryatids. Two theater masks are placed on the cornice; they are probably religious *ex-votos* rather than purely decorative elements. Behind them one has a view into the lateral porticoes that ends at the green rear walls, and the frieze of the upper architrave on the left is decorated with scenes from the Battle of the Centaurs.

In the *oecus*, or reception room, paintings on the rear wall depict *Dionysus and Ariadne*, *Venus and Cupid*, and, on the right, *The Three Graces*. The decoration recalls a poem by Horace in which the poet proposes a toast to Venus, Dionysus, and the Graces. The room's sidewalls bear a cycle of portraits of the Hellenistic kings and the figure of an austere, authoritative old man against a red ground. Winged figures flank the outside of the entrance.

The interpretation of the historical frieze is very controversial, and we will focus on the most recent and widely accepted point of view. The owner of the house commissioned copies of portraits of Hellenistic monarchs who had lived 300 years earlier to be painted on his walls, in order





that he and his guests could admire them while reclining on their dining couches (*triclini*). Philip II, Alexander the Great's father, is represented here (his tomb was discovered in Vergina, Greece, in the late 1970s), as is Philip's mother, Eurydice. Alexander's mother, Olympias, follows; she was complicit in the murder of her husband, Philip II, and is shown playing her lyre. A priestess is engaged in *katoptromantía*, the art of predicting the future by looking into a mirror; here the smooth, polished surface reflects the future birth of the new king, Alexander. On the opposite wall we find the wise old man, wrapped in a heavy cloak and leaning on a stick; he has a vision of the conquest of Asia by Macedonia. The representation is allegorical: Macedonia, seated on the mountains, is identified by the Macedonian arms with a star and by its traditional head-dress—the *kausia*—into which the golden, tubular crown of the kings was fitted. The figure of Asia is represented below, in a subordinate position, wearing a Persian felt hat as its tiara.

The pictures were based on Hellenistic models and, for the Roman patron, they had the merit of evoking a world that seemed, like Macedonia, particularly close to his own. It is also true that Greek art very often passed down to the Romans as plunder from Macedonia, and that booty included interpretations of Greek originals commissioned by the Macedonian dynasty.

The original paintings seem to have been intended as a justification for the Greco-Macedonian incursions into Asia by underscoring a relationship between Alexander and Achilles. Alexander was, through his mother, a descendant of Achilles, the mythical enemy of the Trojans and the people of Asia Minor in general. The reference to Achilles is underscored by the fact that Philip is shown nude, as was the convention in the representation of Greek heroes. The link between Achilles and Alexander offered a mythical antecedent for the latter's invasion of Asia. In 40 B.C., when these works were copied onto the walls of the villa at Boscoreale, this theme had real contemporary significance: Julius Caesar was just then preparing his expedition against the Parthians who lived in Persia. In other words, the pictures expressed the hope, in what were dramatic times, for the return of a new Achilles to conquer the Persians. It is not coincidental that a similar desire was expressed, a little later, in Virgil's fourth Eclogue (beginning in verse 35), composed between 42 and 35 B.C., "There will be other wars, and it will be necessary to send a new, great Achilles to Troy" ("erunt etiam altera bella / atque iterum ad Troiam magnus mitetur Achilles").

Painted decoration with architectural views between columns (Naples, National Archaeological Museum).

Page 38: The Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor. Detail of the Second Style painted decoration on the west wall of the antechamber (O) of the bedroom (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

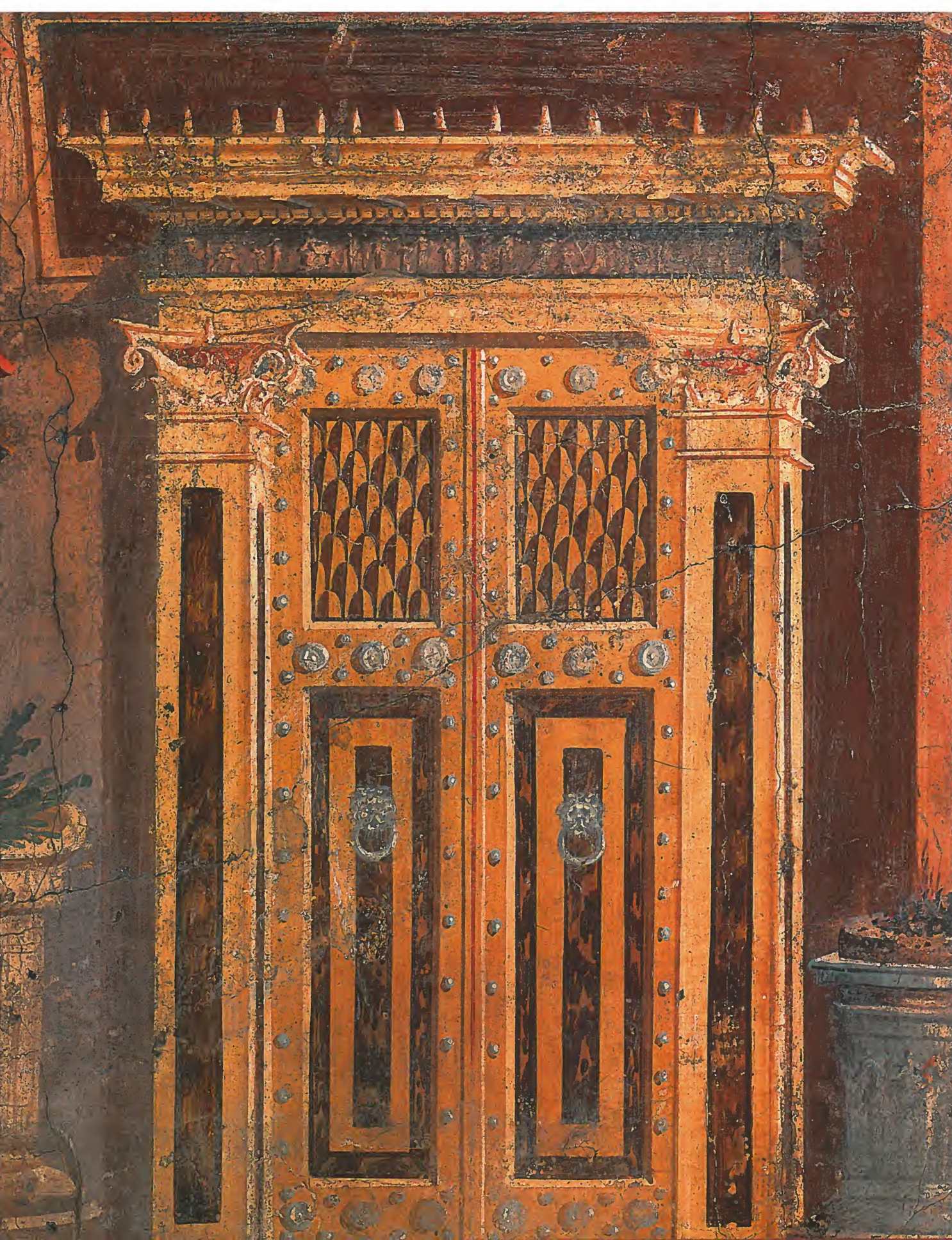
Page 39: The Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor. Detail of the east wall of the *oecus* (H) (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art). These two figures are generally thought to represent Alexander's forebears—his father, Philip II, and Philip's mother, Eurydice.

Pages 40–41: The Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor. West wall of the *oecus* (H) with representations of a historical subject. Here an elderly wise man contemplates the allegorical scene of Macedonia conquering Asia, almost as if it were a vision (Naples, National Archaeological Museum).

Page 42: The Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor. *Cithara Player* on the east wall of the *oecus* (H) (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art). This figure playing her lyre has most recently been identified as Olympias, mother of Alexander the Great.

Page 43: The Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor. Detail of the painted decoration on the east wall of the *oecus* (H) (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art). This scene represents a priestess who uses a mirror to divine the future (*katoptromantia*), and the image that appears on the reflective surface of the shield foretells the birth of the future king, Alexander the Great.

Pages 44–45: The Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor. Detail of the painted decoration on the west wall of the *exedra* (L) (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art). In this architectural detail, a satyr mask and a basket with serpents hang from a garland.

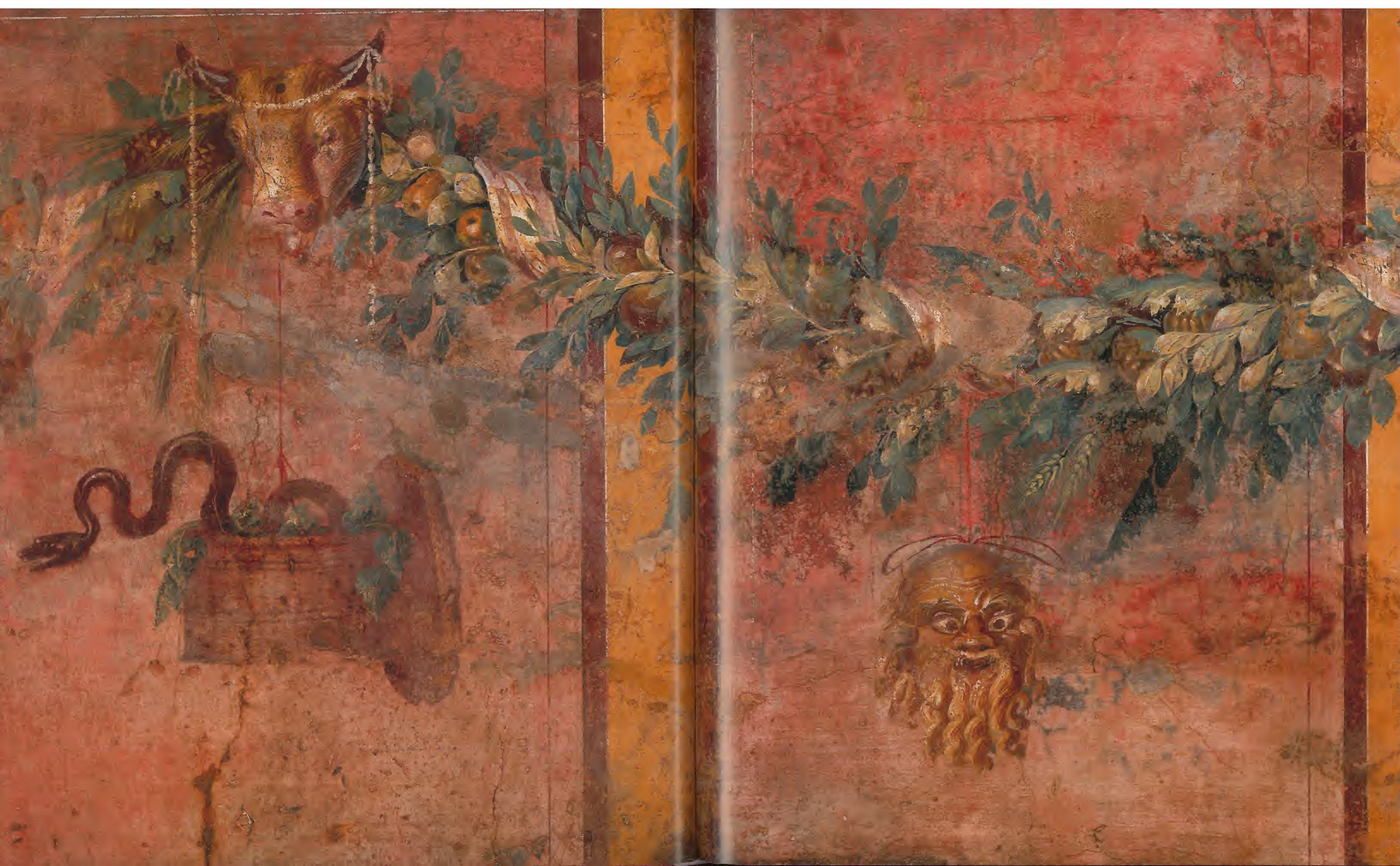












The Villa of the Mysteries

POMPEII

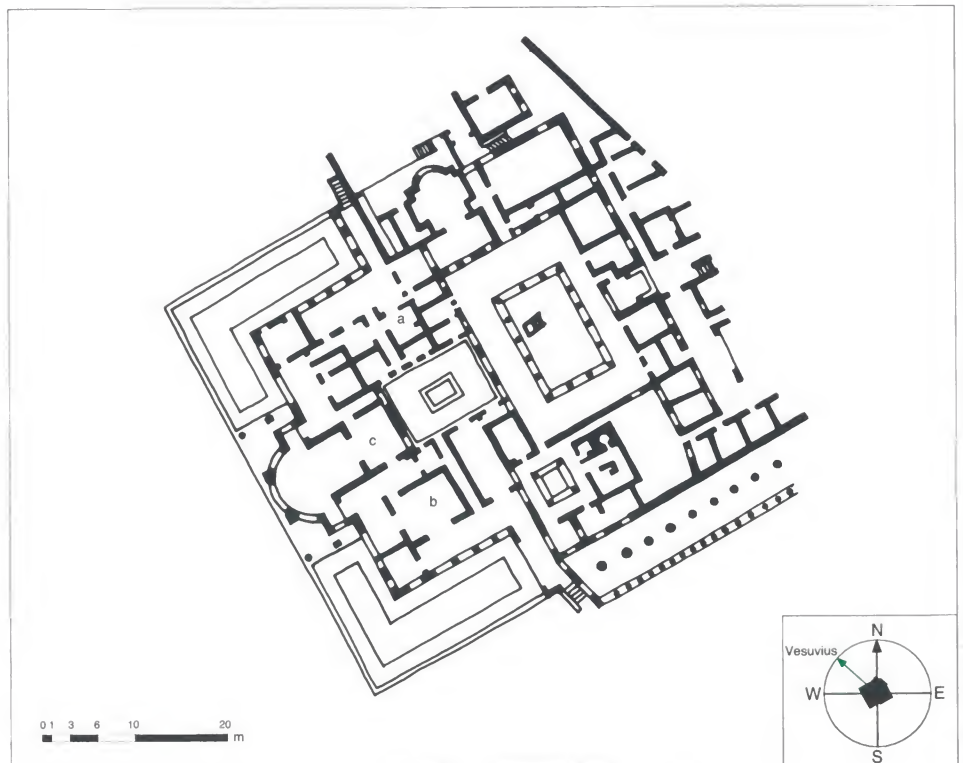
The Villa of the Mysteries is probably the most famous building at Pompeii. It stands outside of town on the road to the Porta Ercolano (Herculaneum Gate). It was first, but only partially, excavated by Giuseppe Spano at the beginning of the twentieth century (1909–10), and then in its entirety by Amadeo Maiuri in 1929–30. The original building dates to the second century B.C., but it was renovated and enlarged many times, gradually transforming from a farmhouse into a true suburban villa. The period of its greatest splendor, however, began with the founding of the Roman colony and lasted to the beginning of the Augustan age. The villa was decorated in the Second Style at the beginning of the first century B.C., and the majestic Dionysiac frieze with its almost life-sized figures in the large *oecus* or reception room, was commissioned at the same time. After the earthquake of A.D. 62, which provoked a serious economic crisis in the city, the villa was used for the production and sale of wine. It became, in the last years of its history, less of an aristocratic residence and more of a farmhouse.

The building was a rectangular block built up on a square cryptoporticus that acted as a platform for the villa (*basis villae*). The house was located on the slope of the mountain, and its inhabitants had a view of the Bay of Naples from its terrace. Its constituent elements included (a) the entrance with rooms for the caretaker, the servants, and the agricultural equipment; (b) the peristyle,

Plan of the Villa of the Mysteries

- a. Bedroom (16) with painted imaginary architecture
- b. Room (5) with the frescoed representation of the Dionysian mystery rites
- c. *Tablinum* (2)

Facing page: The villa's Tuscanic atrium and peristyle.





Painted decoration with architectural motifs in the bedroom (16).

the small atrium with the bath complex, the kitchen courtyard, and the southern portico; and (c) the veranda, the atrium, and the owner's quarters.

The villa's original entrance is exactly opposite today's access; it opened onto the paved street. This is where the carts laden with the grapes harvested in the fields arrived; they unloaded their cargo through the large windows and directly into the storerooms. Once they had delivered the grapes, the farmers would have seated themselves on the benches in the entryway, waiting patiently for their pay.

The earliest part of the villa incorporated its service areas, which included a courtyard surrounded by porticoes that was used for loading and unloading goods. The columns in this peristyle were made of tufa, and the porticoes were closed up by a painted parapet (*pluteum*) that reached to about half their height. One entered the storeroom (48) from one side of the peristyle and the kitchens (42–45) from the other. A small staircase at the far end of the northern portico led down to the underground cryptoporticus, which was illuminated by a series of vents. Four victims of the volcano's catastrophic eruption, possibly workmen, were found in this space. The south side of the cryptoporticus had at one time been transformed into a cistern, but it was being restored to its original function as cellar at the time of the eruption.

A blind corridor gave access to the wine press, or *prelum*, which was originally separate from the rest of the house. The large storeroom (48) was equipped with two presses, one of which had been reconstructed in wood and was decorated with the carved head of a goat, the animal sacred to Dionysus, god of wine. After the wine was pressed, it was left to ferment in jugs in the courtyard before being "bottled" in amphorae.



The owner's quarters came next; they functioned as the family's residence with bedrooms, dining rooms, living rooms, and a semicircular terrace with a view. The atrium, which was separated from the servants' area by a large door, had sumptuous, aristocratic decorations executed in an architectural style with fictive doors and paintings of Nilotic scenes.

The owner's quarters contained many other areas decorated in the Second Pompeian Style. Among them, the large *triclinium* (6) stands out for its beautiful architectural decoration. A small, graceful tetrastyle atrium lies to the east of this dining room, and the rooms around it functioned as a bath complex that included a sauna or *laconicum* (42–44). In a small room near the southeast corner of the atrium, stands a marble statue of a priestess or possibly a personification of Roman piety. This statue must have been put here in storage while restoration work on the house was underway.

Moving from the atrium to the exedra, one passes through a *tablinum* or open living room (2), decorated with Egyptian motifs. They were executed with a miniaturist's precision on a black wall polished to a mirrorlike shine. It is one of the most refined examples of the decorative style in the Augustan age.

From the exedra one can proceed through a small door into the bed alcove of the nuptial bedroom. The grandiosity of the paintings here is actually astonishing, as are the unusual dimensions of the figures and the sense of religious enchantment that emanates from the work as a whole. The large *oecus* (5) next to the nuptial bedchamber (4) contains the famous frieze representing the "mysteries" of the Dionysus cult that give the villa its name. The paintings here represent the initiation of a young woman into the mysteries of matrimony according to the beliefs of the cult. Perhaps the

Painted decoration in the *tablinum* (2).





Above: View of the painted decoration in Room 5 with its representation of the mystery rites. The scenes represent the initiation of a young woman into the mysteries of matrimony according to the cult of Dionysus.

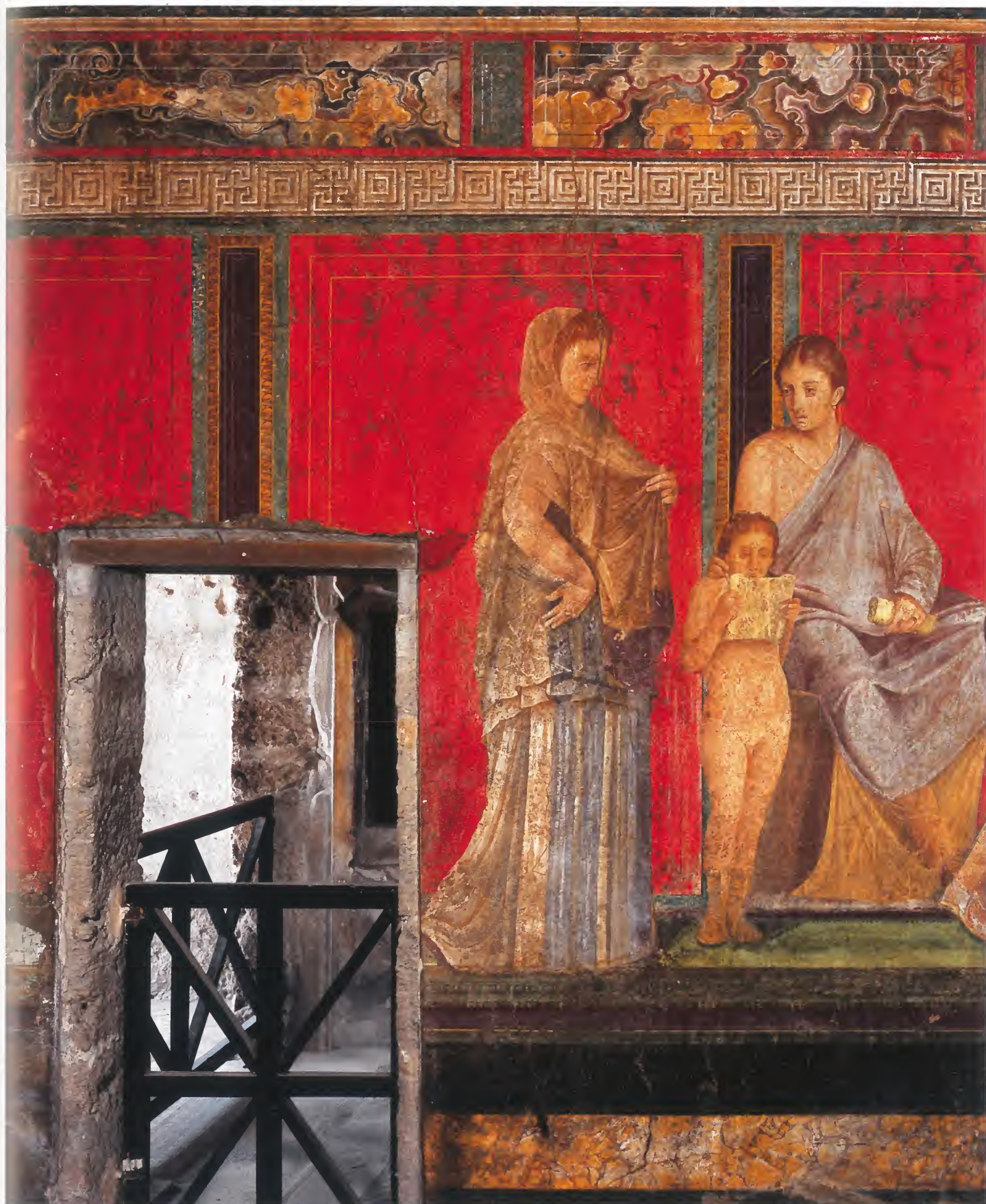
Below: Graphic reconstruction of the paintings in Room 5.

Facing page: Detail of the mystery rites in Room 5. Flanked by two priestesses, the young Dionysus sings a hymn written on a papyrus scroll.

villa's owners commissioned this exultation of the wine god Dionysus because of the great fortune they amassed in the wine business.

The twenty-nine figures in the painting are gathered in groups that represent different moments in the sacred ceremony, in which human activity mixes with that of the divinities who participate in the rituals. The frieze includes the figure of a matron who both participates in and oversees the ceremony, watching that all is done as it should be. The small Dionysus, accompanied by two priestesses, sings a hymn written on a papyrus scroll, while others prepare offerings including a sweet country-style cake, holy water for ablutions, and a small olive branch for sprinkling it. Silenus plays a lyre while two small satyrs accompany him with their panpipes. The goddess Aura descends from heaven, her mantle filled by wind. A second Silenus, father of all satyrs, and two small satyrs stand apart from the others in the corner; the young one sees the mask behind him reflected in his cup of water and realizes that this is how he will look when he is old. Dionysus presides over the scene at the center; he is drunk and sprawls across the lap of Ariadne or perhaps of Venus, the protector goddess of the city. Beside them the priestesses prepare to uncover a large wooden phallos standing on a wooden chest. The young initiate buries her face in the lap of a priestess as she is scourged by a winged god. In enduring the pain inflicted on her, she proves that she is an adult, ready for marriage. Beside her, her companions sing and play the cymbals trying to distract her and alleviate her pain. Having passed the test, the young woman is then seen preparing for her wedding ceremony; a maid dresses her hair while a cupid, sent by Venus, holds up her mirror.





Page 53: The Villa of the Mysteries. Detail of the mystery rites depicted in Room 5. A matron oversees the initiation ceremony

Page 54: The Villa of the Mysteries. Detail of the mystery rites depicted in Room 5. Priestesses preparing offerings for the celebration of the rites.

Page 55: The Villa of the Mysteries. Detail of the mystery rites depicted in Room 5. The goddess Aura stands with her mantle catching the wind.

Pages 56–57: The Villa of the Mysteries. Detail of the mystery rites depicted in Room 5. Sitting near Silenus on the left side of the composition, a young man looks at his own reflection in a cup of wine but sees the reflection of a mask behind the satyr's back. A drunken Dionysus sprawls across Aphrodite's lap on the right.

Pages 58–59: The Villa of the Mysteries. Detail of the mystery rites depicted in Room 5. The priestess on the left prepares to uncover a large phallos in a country basket while on the right a winged divinity holds a whip.

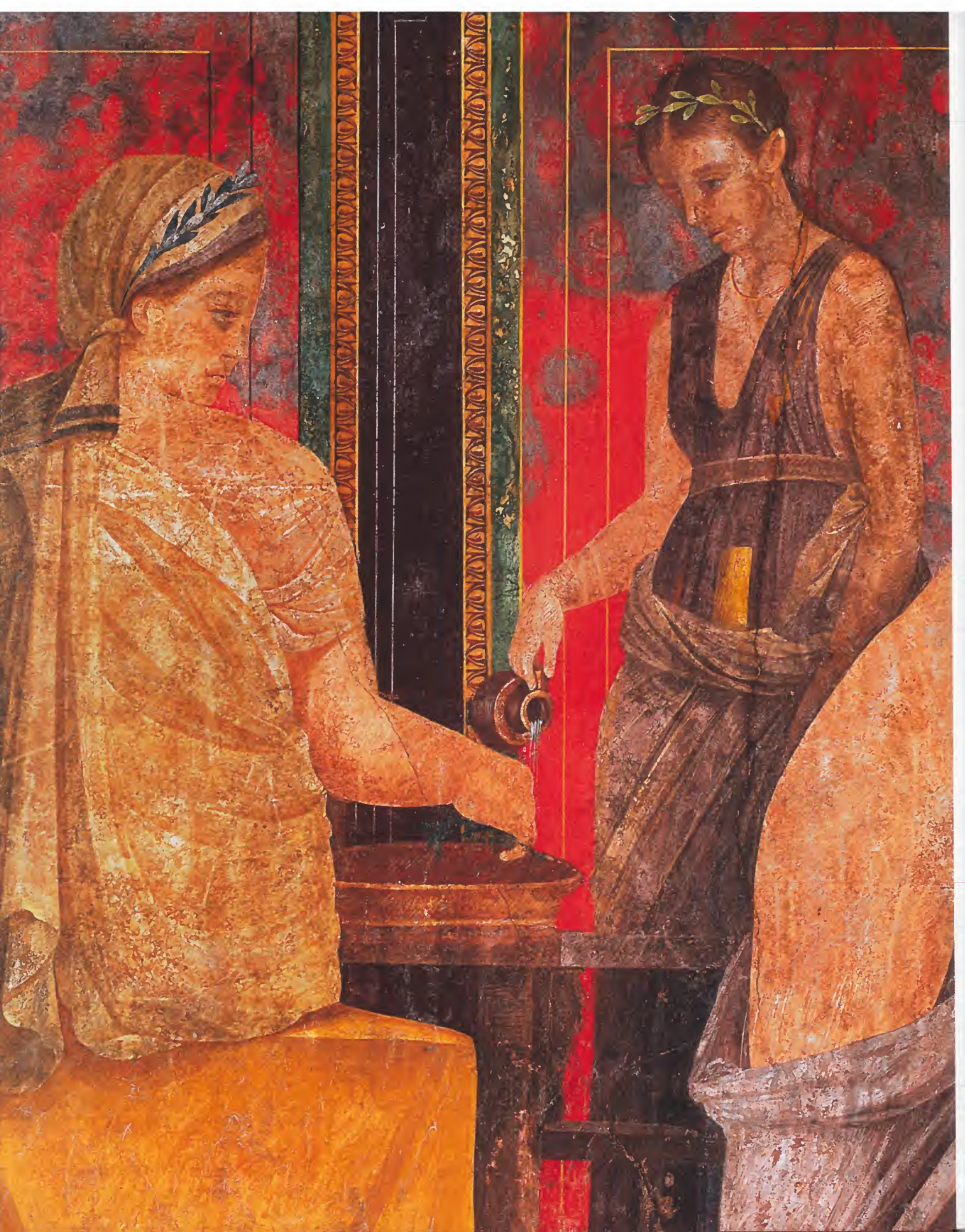
Page 60: The Villa of the Mysteries. Detail of the mystery rites depicted in Room 5. The young woman, scourged by a winged divinity, buries her head in the lap of a priestess. Next to her a group of bacchantes dance to alleviate her pain.

Page 61: The Villa of the Mysteries. Detail of the mystery rites depicted in Room 5. Detail of the young woman who kneels to be flogged by the winged divinity.

Page 62: The Villa of the Mysteries. Detail of the mystery rites depicted in Room 5. Having survived the initiation ritual, the young bride prepares for her wedding. A maid dresses her hair while a cupid holds up a mirror.

Page 63: The Villa of the Mysteries. Detail of the mystery rites depicted in Room 5. Detail of a cupid.



















The Villa of Poppea

OPLONTIS

A vast Roman villa with sumptuous decorations was excavated in the 1960s and 1970s in Torre Annunziata near Naples. It has since been identified as the villa of the empress Poppea, wife of Nero.

In Roman times (that is, after the Social War and the founding at Pompeii of the Cornelia Veneria colony in 80 B.C.), this area for the most part had widely scattered villas. In the case of this particular villa, however, the large buildings may have been grouped as they would be in town; this seems to be the case with the so-called Villa B, a second complex of structures still being excavated in Via Murat. We may hypothesize that it was a sort of semi-urban aggregate, almost a village (*vicus*) of Pompeii out the countryside. This might also explain why the name of Oplontis is included in the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, one of the oldest maps of the Roman world.

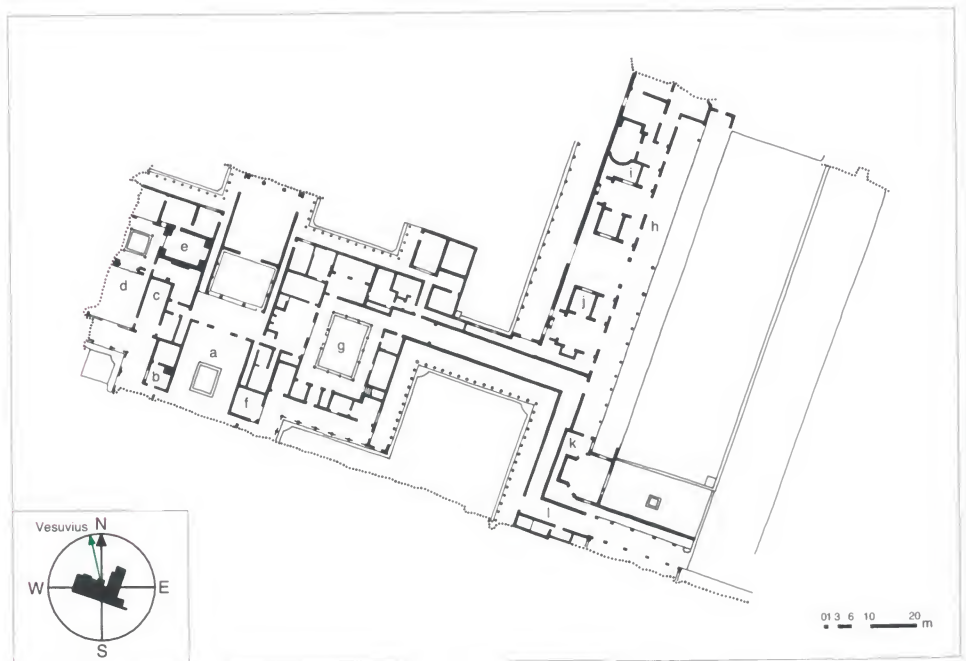
The construction technique and decorations of the villa suggest that it must have been built around the middle of the first century B.C. Only about thirty years earlier the Roman general Lucius Cornelius Sulla had conquered Pompeii and installed a Roman colony there. Roman aristocrats had been making substantial real-estate investments in the area around the Bay of Naples, which Cicero called the *cratere* ("crater" or "bowl"), for several decades. There they built pleasure villas, country houses, nurseries, thermal baths, and other large structures. For this reason and because the villa is so very large, it seems most likely that it belonged to a Roman rather than to a local Pompeian colonial or to a member of the Samnite aristocracy, whose land would have been seized when the area was colonized.



Above: View of the peristyle of the villa's north facade.

Right: Plan of the Villa of Poppea

- a. Atrium (5)
- b. Bedroom (11)
- c. *Triclinium* (14)
- d. *Oecus* (15)
- e. *Caldarium* (8)
- f. *Diaeta* (23)
- g. Peristyle (32)
- h. Portico (60)
- i. *Viridarium* (87)
- j. Room 68
- k. Room 66
- l. Room 81





View of the bedroom (11).

The First Architectural Phase of the Villa

The original villa had a compact plan with a central rectangular unit built around a large atrium (5) with an enclosed garden (20)—likely later rebuilt—a large reception hall, and perhaps a dining room (21). The entrance would have been on the south side, connected to the coastal road; it is now covered by the Sarno Canal.

Two nearly square, symmetrical wings flank the central portion of the villa. The western wing has been only partially excavated. It contained the owner's quarters and had a central reception room or *oecus* (15) and a dining room (14), as well as several other spaces (bedrooms or *cubicula* and *diaeta*) (11–12) decorated with Second Style wall paintings. Some sections of the western wing were built later, including a bath complex constructed around a small tetrastyle portico (16) with a kitchen (*prae-furnium*) (7), a *caldarium* (8), a *tepidarium*, and other spaces associated with the baths (31, 17). These areas were decorated in the Third and Fourth Pompeian Styles.

The eastern wing was primarily a service wing. It was designed around a central portico with an interior garden and a small, cascading fountain. This section of the villa included a large hall with a *lararium* (27), storerooms (35, 44, 43), and small rooms for slaves on the floor above. The service functions were largely performed in interior spaces that were decorated with simple motifs of yellow and blue stripes. The rooms facing the exterior (23, 37, 38, 41, 30, 29), on the other hand, were decorated with mosaic pavements and refined paintings done in the Second, Third, and Fourth Styles. These rooms belonged to the residential part of the villa and functioned as passageways and areas for relaxation. Especially interesting is the small “bathroom” area that consisted of a little *caldarium* (49) and a latrine (47, 48).

It is difficult to say whether the north (13) and south porticoes, decorated with Fourth Style paintings, were part of the first building phase. The corner location of Rooms 12, 13, and 23, all of which are decorated in the Second Style, does suggest that at least the south portico (7) might belong to the first phase of the villa. The outer boundaries of this early building can be placed

Hercules in the Garden of the Hesperides, painted decoration on the east wall of the *caldarium* (8).



at the east wall of Rooms 44, 45, and 49, since a perimeter wall was found underneath the pavement in Room 45. During this first phase, a *pars rustica* or service building (Rooms 82, 83, 84, and possibly 81) stood apart from the principal building, though it was dependent upon the main structure. It contained a *torcularium*, or press house, and was probably affiliated with a surrounding farm (*praedium*), which produced either grapes or olives.

The Second Building Phase of the Villa

The villa was renovated in the Julio-Claudian period: it was primarily a modernization of the pictorial decorations—in Rooms 25 and 10, for example—rather than a transformation of the building itself. The major changes of the second phase would take place some decades later.

The second architectural phase of the villa included the construction, on its eastern side, of magnificent new quarters facing a large pool (*natatio*) that was about sixty meters long (about 200 roman or 196 standard feet) and seventeen meters (56 ft.) wide. It was not unique: the Villa of the Papyrus Scrolls at Herculaneum also had an extraordinary basin (66.6 × 7.14 m, or 219 × 23 ft.) that was used as a swimming pool. A passage in Pliny (*Letters* 5.25) describing his Tuscan villa suggests that these basins were indeed intended as swimming pools or *natationes*, “si natare latius . . . velis, in area piscina est . . .” (if you wish to have a swim . . . there is a pool outside in the courtyard . . .).

This pool was the principal element of the new part of the building, and it was undoubtedly originally wider (Area 80, up to the edge of the portico [60]) and likely also longer (up to the *ambulatio* with the pergola [91]). Later problems with the stability of the portico columns (60) necessitated the buttressing of the colonnade foundations, and this reduced the size of the pool.

There are two architectural complexes around the pool, both intended for recreation and repose. The complex to the west between the two porticoes (60 and 62a) is designed around a large room (69) that is almost a pendant to Room 21, but with a rich marble pavement worked in *opus sectile*. This room is situated along the cross axis of the pool, and its location is marked



Left: View of the *diaeta* (23). The wall facing the viewer is on the west side of the room.

Below: North wall of the *diaeta* (23) with its imaginary architecture.



in the portico by marble columns that are taller and spaced more widely than those in the rest of the colonnade.

The two identical apsidal rooms (65 and 74), both of them dining rooms, were conceived as symmetrical pendants to the reception hall (69). They are especially noteworthy because of the four small, interior gardens (68, 70, 61, and 87) that they contain, gardens that offered banquet guests a continuum of surprising perspectives. The service passageways (67 and 71), which are extensions of the corridors (53 and 62), were carefully laid out so that servants could unobtrusively



View of the peristyle (32).

Facing page: View of Room 66.

go about their tasks without disturbing the guests' enjoyment of the scenographic perspectives. One should note here, too, that the graffiti on the walls of the villa is mostly written in Greek, suggesting that the servants, probably from the East, were both cultured and well-trained in the demands of a luxurious household.

The second nucleus of buildings, at the southwest corner of the swimming pool, closes the portico (60) with an architectural arrangement similar to the placement of Rooms 54, 57, and 58 with respect to the portico (34) in the original core of the villa. Room 78, however, enriches the later building with its sophisticated design and decoration. Its windows open onto the pool, and its wood paneling—now unfortunately lost—and floors paved with marble in *opus sectile* betray its unique refinement. A comparison with the similar *diaeta* in the Villa of San Marco at Stabia demonstrates that this architectural element was then in vogue in porticoes around swimming pools. Unfortunately, however, excavation work has yet to reach either the northern end of this eastern block of the Villa of Poppea, or the southern, where the short side of the swimming pool courtyard had an *ambulatio* with a pergola supported on masonry piers (86). It is therefore difficult to get a precise sense of the complex as a whole.

Based on its pictorial decoration, this part of the villa complex can be dated to the middle or the end of the Fourth Style (A.D. 50–70), as we can see when, for example, we compare the paintings in the portico to those in Room 7 of the House of the Centenary at Pompeii (IX 8.6). The style of the Corinthian capitals in Portico 60 also accords with this dating, although they may be a little earlier. In any case, all the decoration seems to predate the earthquake of A.D. 62. This tremor caused serious damage to the porticoes, including one with brick columns (62a), which was completely destroyed, and one with marble columns and capitals (60), whose pieces were found in storage waiting to be restored.

To summarize, the villa complex consists of two distinct cores—the one to the west is older, dating to the middle of the first century B.C., and has a plan that derives from the Roman atrium-style house. The other is to the east; it dates to the period of Nero's reign and was designed around the *natatio* or swimming pool. The two parts were joined by a gallery (46), a service corridor (62), and a portico (40), all assembled into a unified link between the buildings. This solution was a necessary but perhaps not very elegant way to resolve the problems of function inherent in a villa with two centers, each conceived as a distinct whole.



A similar problem can be found at the Villa of the Papyrus Scrolls at Herculaneum and the Villa of San Marco at Stabia; here, too, there is some incoherence in the connections between the swimming pool area and the older part of the house. In any case, all these examples testify to the rising demand for swimming pools.

The connecting wing of the Villa of Poppea must also have been built before A.D. 62 since it was used as a storage area for some of the materials damaged in the earthquake in that year. For example, a heap of bricks from the ruined columns and a marble Neo-Attic krater with relief carvings were discovered in the corridor (62). It seems clear, too, that the renovation work had not been completed when Mount Vesuvius put a permanent end to it in A.D. 79. In the portico, for instance, the mortar and crushed terra-cotta flooring had not yet been installed and an old cistern was still open in the ambulatory.

The villa at Oplontis is remarkable for its sheer enormity. Approximately 3,650 square meters (39,200 sq. ft.) of built area—including pergolas, pool, gardens, etc.—has thus far been excavated; the whole complex is approximately 130 meters (427 ft.) in length and 110 meters (361 ft.) wide, which makes it smaller only than the Villa of the Papyrus Scrolls at Herculaneum (ca. 260 × 170 m, or 853 × 558 ft.). Yet it is also an important monument because of the planning principles that underlay both its spatial composition and its green areas. Research done by Wilhelmina Jashemski of the University of Maryland on the gardens at Oplontis, a project that has proceeded hand in hand with the archaeological excavations, has revolutionized the method for studying the gardens of Pompeii. She has demonstrated, among other things, that the buildings and the gardens were strongly interconnected, indeed that each was conceived as a function of the other, and that they must both have been designed by an architect and a gardener (*topiaries*) of great ability. It is also important to remember the key role that sculpture played in this context, since the pieces were arranged according to decorative schemes closely related to the setting. Paintings with garden themes were also often painted on the walls of the gardens themselves to amplify their space and visual effects illusionistically. This villa thus seems an admirable fusion of every component of the architectural and decorative culture of the time.

By far the most important garden at the villa is the one to the east of the swimming pool. A long avenue runs alongside the basin; it is flanked on its east side by thirteen statue bases, and behind each of them once stood a tree, most likely a plane tree. This line of trees and statues created an open-air gallery set against the backdrop of the Lattari Mountains. Guests at the villa could take in this ensemble as they strolled under the marble portico along the pool. The sculpture placed around the garden must have created the sense of a gymnasium that was in complete harmony with the Hellenistic tendencies of Roman culture.

The marvels of the gardens continued in Area 92 in front of Pergola 91. This space was probably kept as an open field. The windows of the *diaeta* (78) overlooked this green vista. The walls of this refined room were clad in wood paneling decorated with intarsia, and through its windows the villa's owner could show his guests a lovely Greek krater-fountain made of marble and decorated with figures representing pyrrhic dancers—Neo-Attic imitations of those at the base of the Acropolis in Athens. The less high-minded could instead turn their gaze to a sculptural group of a satyr and a hermaphrodite, their erotic game reflected in the water at the edge of the pool. This refined decoration offers a stark contrast to the simplicity of the plants and songbirds painted on the white socle of the external wall of the *diaeta* (78) and the corridor (85).

The play of illusion and visual references reaches its apogee in the sequence of interior gardens on the south (68 and 61) and north (70 and 89) sides of the large reception room. They were constructed as rooms open to the sky, and they alternate in a system of careful symmetry with the two matching apsidal rooms (65 and 74), providing them with a source of natural light. The living plants in these gardens and the even more luxuriant ones painted on the walls participate in an optical game of continual alteration between what is real and what is illusion on a single axis that passes through the windows. The paintings of birds and animals, kraters, and other



View of the atrium (5).

pieces of fictive sculpture are carefully studied and they almost compete with the real ones one could admire beside the pool and in the niches of the *triclinia* themselves. Garden 68 (3×3 m, or 10×10 ft.) still has four cavities from the roots of the bushes planted there, and the bones of a dormouse and an oak mouse were found in Garden 70. They may have been kept in cages as pets, just as hamsters and gerbils are today.

The Villa of Poppea at Oplontis is a splendid example of a Roman pleasure (*otium*) and luxury (*luxuria*) villa. We find there all the refinements of architecture and garden design and of painting and sculpture employed with great care so that the proprietor might enjoy a pleasant stay. It is ironic that one of its greatest charms, a simultaneous view of the sea and the mountains, is now lost forever.

The Paintings

The Second Style decoration of the atrium constitutes one of the largest surviving pictorial cycles. It transforms the spaces into a sumptuous Hellenistic palace. Like a classical stage set, the fictive facade of this palace has three doors, only one of which—the southernmost—is real. Raised on a low, black socle, almost two-thirds of the imaginary building is represented, and its central block corresponds with the *impluvium* in the atrium.

The central section of the building rests on a podium interrupted by the middle door. The portal is flanked by two columns decorated with stone blocks and thunderbolts framed by rhombi and by two small pilasters. There is a stair here with a torch, and at the top of the staircase a sumptuous door, the *valva regina* of the theatrical set; its ornate knockers have knobs on their cornices, bands that frame the lower panels, and winged Victories in the upper squares. The lintel is protected by a console with fillets, a dentil cornice, and modillions with griffin heads. Above there is a painting of an architectural landscape.

Beside the door and corresponding to two recesses, there are two symmetrical niches with red-brown walls. There are two shields inside on each wall, with female heads in relief (*imagines clipeatae*). Silver chests lie on the floor of the niches; they have gilded bronze lids and a crown decorated with gemstones. *Aediculae* with Ionic columns across their facades and pilasters in the



Above: View of the painted decoration in the atrium (5).

Right: View of the *triclinium* (14).



corners flank the niches and are represented in sharp foreshortening. The back wall is painted in cinnabar red and has two cornices above with theater masks resting on them. Two silver censers on the floor have bases decorated with figures, and perforated spheres above.

One of the sides of the building is represented in strong foreshortening to the right of its central core. A door opens to reveal a flight of steps with a gilded bronze tripod with animal claw

feet at its foot. Two sets of four alabaster Tuscanic columns line the stairs. The Doric frieze has metopes with alternating patera and bulls' skulls. The iron tie-rods between the columns bear rows of typical Macedonian golden shields decorated with stars. A shallow space appears behind the Tuscanic colonnade, its green base highlighting a cinnabar-red wall that ends at a Corinthian pilaster with an Ionic architrave in the corner. There is a white pier at the northern end of the wall; it stands on a black socle and acts to frame the whole scene.

A few fragments that were never replaced during the restoration show that the upper part of the wall had been painted with architectural motifs against the open sky. The floor is a white mosaic with a meander motif, represented in perspective around the *impluvium*.

In keeping with current fashion, the architectural decorations of the *triclinium*, as well as its mosaics and pictures, divide the room into two spaces: an inner area and a sort of antechamber. A Corinthian pilaster separates the painted wall into two parts, and its griffin head volutes correspond to the mosaic threshold between them. The antechamber is decorated with a closed wall with a high socle; it consists of a black plinth, a red stringcourse, and three courses of *opus isodomum*, a strictly regular masonry style. The middle section of the wall has orthostata decorated with sacred landscapes executed in a yellow monochrome. Above runs a band of fictive marble, a red cornice with white brackets, and modillions shaped like stylized claws. The upper zone of the wall has slabs of polychrome marble that frame blue tiles with little cupids. The inner part of the room is decorated with an architectural panorama dotted with sanctuaries. A rectangular podium with reddish brown and green panels framed by yellow cornices stands on a black base. The building above is built on a green platform, which in turn stands on a yellow basement set just slightly back on the podium. The central element is made up of *columnae caelatae*, golden column shafts adorned with vine tendrils and red and blue gemstones. The Ionic capitals are painted with male heads. Two white sphinxes lean out over the architecture from the projecting architrave. A false recess is painted with a pair of wooden double doors fitted with lion-head knockers, crowned by a curved gold pediment. The doors are fitted between red antes that are guarded above by two golden griffins, and a golden shield with festoons hangs above. Tiny winged figures alternate with floral effusions across the upper edges of the doors.

Behind this fictive gate rises a *tholos* with a conical roof. Inside it we can make out a statue of the goddess Juno with a diadem on her head, and beyond the temple the internal portico of a sanctuary.

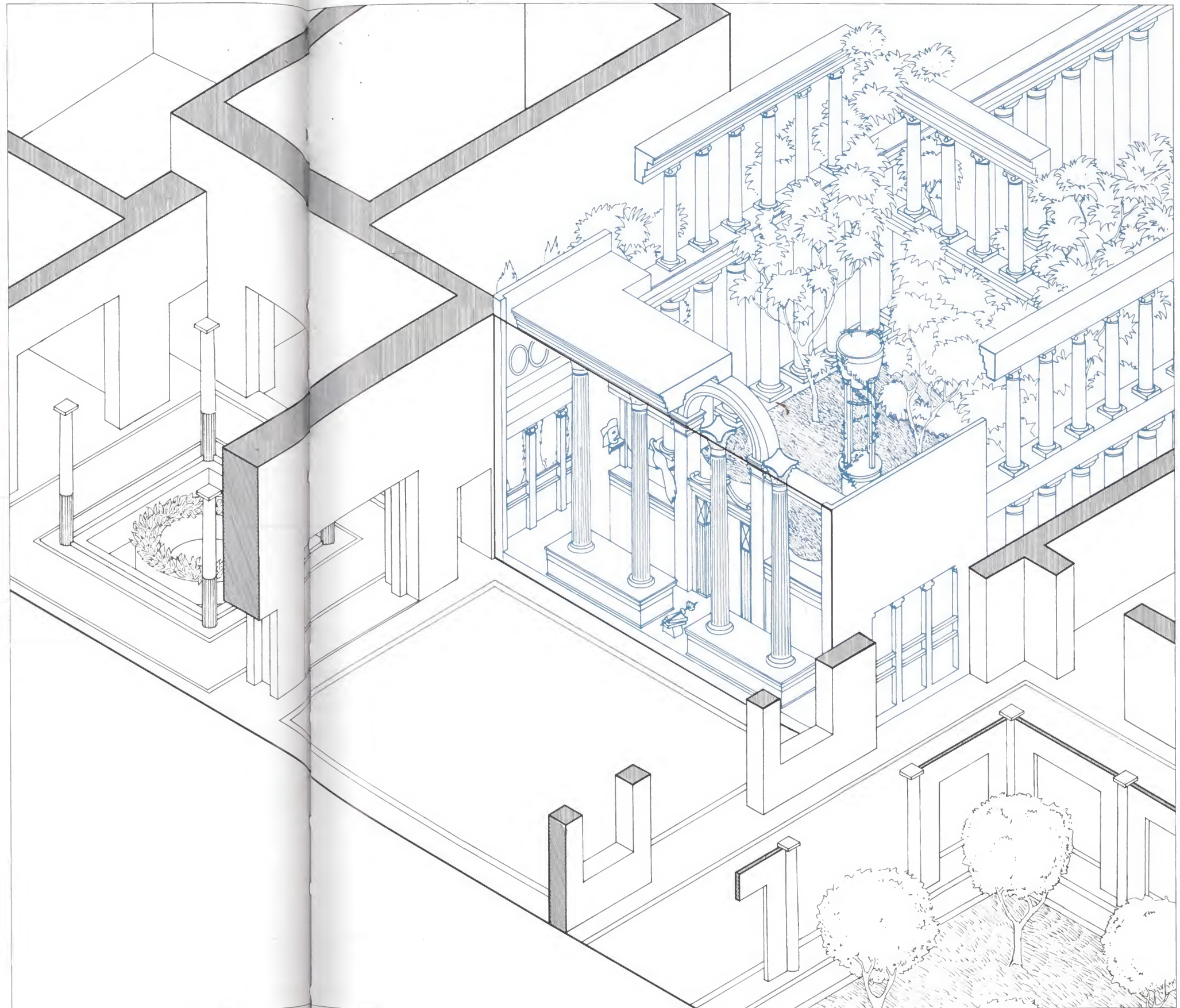
Three columns of Numidian yellow marble flank the two niches on either side of the central *propylea*. The niches recede slightly and are screened by low curtains; beyond them we can see a row of small Ionic pilasters that are connected by iron tie-rods. The arched bay is decorated simply with a garland of leaves, although *imagines clipeatae* with busts of the gods hang from the surrounding entablatures; the one on the left has disappeared, but the bust of Vulcan-Hephaestus, identifiable by his helmet and tongs, is still visible on the right. Two short, reddish brown walls stretch between the central *propylea* and the lateral niches, and they serve as a backdrop for gilded-bronze censers with lion's paw feet. There are two silver kraters on the parapet above them. Other decorative elements include a torch in front of the central portal and two colored birds hopping around on the socle.

A fascia decorated with arms and positioned between two projecting cornices finishes the painted scene at the top of the wall. The floor is a white mosaic with a black ribbon motif around the edge. A threshold decorated with a polychrome meander motif marks the passage from the vestibule into the dining room, and a small mosaic carpet with colored perspectival lozenges lies at the center of the *triclinium* between the dining couches.

The *oecus*, unfortunately not yet fully excavated, contains one of the loveliest examples of Second Style wall decoration. The composition shows a sanctuary of Apollo framed at either side by pilasters. The two arms of a portico begin at these pilasters and sweep back into space toward the center of the composition; the spaces between its red pilasters are delimited by a

Below: Painted decoration in the *oecus* (15).

Right: Perspectival rendering of the imaginary architecture in the painted decoration of the *oecus* (15). The virtual space suggested by the painting is rendered axonometrically with respect to the actual space of the room where the fresco is located. (Drawing by Ludovica Bucci de Santis and Simonetta Capechi.)



balustrade below, and above is a view of open sky. Antelope skulls hang from the pilasters. A wall of green *opus isodomum* rises above the entablature architrave, and it has a corbel table supported by S-shaped modillions with a row of shields resting on top of it.

The real *propylea* stands where the arms of the portico converge; it has four Corinthian columns standing on two podia that are composed of colored marble blocks. The back wall of the *propylea*, on a second plane visible at the center of the composition between the podia and the middle two columns, shows a door set between Ionic pilasters that support a rounded arch above. In the lower half there is a small opening that reveals a half-closed iron gate. Beyond it one catches a glimpse of a luxuriant garden with a giant golden tripod decorated with precious stones and, to the rear, a frieze of filigreed stars that stands on a high cylindrical base, decorated with garlands of leaves. A low wall terminates the *propylea*'s intercolumniations. A large red entablature creates a horizontal connection between the central arch and the sidewalls, and behind it lies a powerful, two-storied portico with a Tuscan order below and an Ionic order above.

A number of isolated decorative elements appear in this area of the painting. For example, a torch rests on the stones at the foot of the doorway to the sanctuary; two small bay laurel branches lie on the podium in the spaces between the columns; and two songbirds cavort next to the bases of the central columns. Two theater masks hang in the openings between the lateral columns on the consoles, and next to them we see two majestic peacocks on a lowered curtain.

View of the *viridarium* (87).

Facing page: View of the *viridarium* (87).



And finally, above, between the lateral columns and the red entablature, there are two small pictures (*pinakes*) with foreshortened shutters, representing seaside or lakeside landscapes. The contemporary mosaic pavement is made of colored marble *tesserae* arranged in a basket weave.

The sequence of small gardens, on axis with the interior of the rectangular room facing the pool, constitutes one of the most refined elements of imperial architecture—in this instance, added on to the nucleus of a Republican-era villa. The painted gardens in the wall decoration accentuate the visual play of gardens echoing one another through the broad, axial windows. Thus the solid walls on the east and west ends of the rooms are decorated with a pair of painted windows against a red ground. Above the socle, which is enlivened with baskets of flowering plants, the window uprights are covered with climbing ivy vines. Through the windows, and set against an unrealistic yellow ground, are views of gardens with trees, shrubs, and statue fountains. In one opening, the figure of a female centaur surmounts a square fountain basin; her companion stands above a circular basin, while sphinxes hold the fountains in the panels next to them. A marble Neo-Attic krater, accompanied by a giant winged creature with serpentine feet, adorns the north wall. A superb peacock reposes at its edge while other birds flit through the branches of the central tree and among the bushes in the background.

Page 78: The Villa of Poppea. Detail of a column decorated with gemstones and foliage, from the west wall of the *triclinium* (14) with the *Temple of Hera*.

Page 79: The Villa of Poppea. Detail of the painted decoration in the *oecus* (15).

Page 80: The Villa of Poppea. Detail of the painted decoration of the north wall of the *diaeta* (23). A basket of fruit rests on the trabeation of the imaginary architecture.

Page 81: The Villa of Poppea. Detail of the painted decoration of the north wall of the *diaeta* (23). A small wicker basket filled with fruit and covered with a translucent cloth.





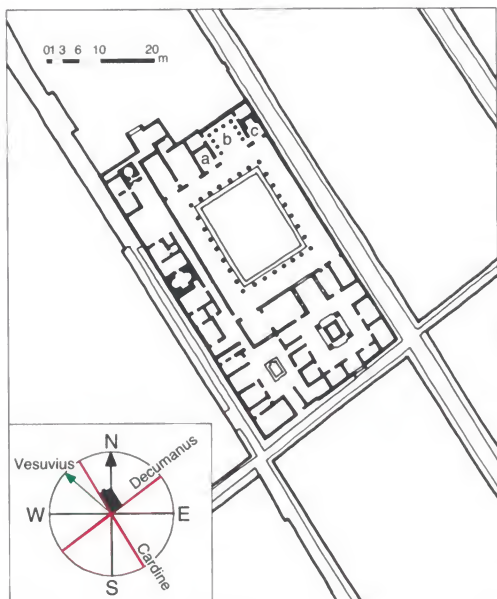






The House of the Labyrinth

POMPEII



Plan of the House of the Labyrinth

- a. Bedroom (42).
- b. Corinthian *oecus* (43).
- c. Bedroom (46).

Facing page: View of the tetrastyle atrium.

Pablo Picasso visited this house in Pompeii in the early part of the twentieth century. While he was there, he made a sketch of the mosaic depicting the *Battle between Theseus and the Minotaur in the Labyrinth*, which initiated the artist's famous series of works featuring the Minotaur. One can only imagine his dismay if he could see the mosaic today. That mosaic, which gave the house its name, as well as the magnificent painting and mosaics around it, were completely destroyed by the collapse of the roof overhead.

This aristocratic residence, which dates to the Samnite period, was located just behind the House of the Faun and belonged to an old Pompeian family. Like other contemporary houses, the House of the Labyrinth had two atria and a large peristyle, but it also had a private bath complex and a bakery with three millstones.

Characteristic of the house's splendor is the now collapsed but once sumptuous reception hall that was located at the center of the principal side of the peristyle (43). The room is essentially square (6.7×6.8 m, or 22×22.3 ft.). It is the most aristocratic example of its type, the *oecus corinthius*, to have survived. Vitruvius described this type of room as having ten columns, all stuccoed in white and set against the walls to accentuate the illusionistic and architectural effect of the paintings. The columns and wall decorations seem to have been harmoniously fused into a single architectural vision, which included both real elements and the perspective paintings. This room functioned both as a living room and as a reception hall; it opened onto the garden in order to capture cool breezes in the summer. The scenes on the north side represent a cityscape similar to that in the *cubiculum* at the villa at Boscoreale, and views of a sanctuary on the east and west sides. The architectural motifs derive from a repertoire of Hellenistic architectural forms and, at the same time, from Greek-inspired Roman architecture.

At the center of the painted scene is a small, circular temple (*tholos*) with a lamp hanging between its columns; it is framed by a broken tympanum with a blue architrave supported by gilded-bronze Doric columns whose constituent drums are decorated with figures. This temple is most likely a sanctuary dedicated to Aphrodite. The lateral fields have colonnades in perspective that are closed by a violet and cinnabar screen. A satirical mask hangs on the screen to the left, and, to the right, a cluster of birds suspended by their feet. Two large, metal amphorae flank an altar at the center of the podium.

The parallel between the painted architecture here (and in other Second Style complexes) and Hellenistic architecture is striking. The motif of the *tholos* framed by a broken pediment, for example, might be compared to the Khazneh el-Farun at Petra in Jordan, which was likely rebuilt according to well-known Hellenistic-Asiatic models. And how can one not think of the legendary Alexandria in Egypt!

The pavement in this room, which uses colored mosaic tiles to create a black-and-white effect, is contemporary with its painted decoration. The central mosaic emblem was made in *opus sectile* (cut-stone work) of colored marbles.

Palladio, the great Renaissance architect and author of the *Four Books on Architecture*, certainly knew nothing of Pompeii, but he could have had direct knowledge of the grandiose ruins on the Palatine Hill, the Domus Aurea, and the other imperial buildings in Rome. He was also





View of the east wall of the Corinthian *oecus* (43).

Facing page, upper left: Detail of the east wall of the Corinthian *oecus* (43) showing a circular temple (*tholos*) with a lamp hanging between its columns.

Facing page, upper right: Detail of the east wall of the Corinthian *oecus* (43) with a metal amphora, a theatrical mask, and birds hung by their feet.

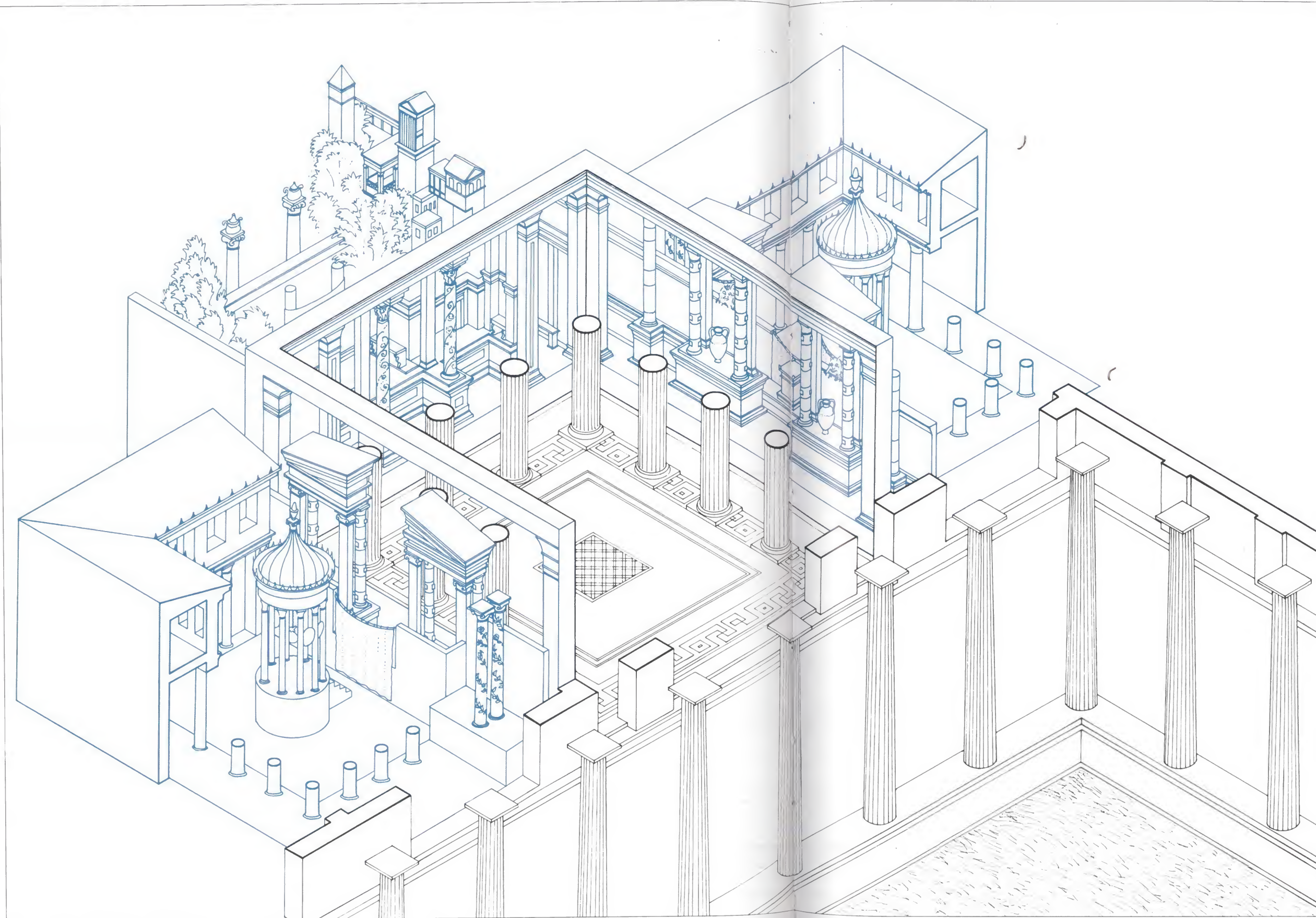
Facing page, lower left and right: Details of the north wall of the Corinthian *oecus* (43) with views of a city.

inspired by Vitruvius, and he was interested in the latter's description of the various types of reception rooms (*oeci*), especially those with columns. Palladio created his own genial interpretations of these spaces, and they are remarkably like what survives at Pompeii at the House of Meleager, the House of the Silver Wedding, and the House of the Labyrinth, as well as at Herculaneum in the House of the Mosaic Atrium. The fact that Vitruvius and then Palladio mention them demonstrates the importance of this element of ancient architecture. Palladio said, "The architect must make it clear, as Vitruvius says in his first and sixth books, important men and especially those in public service must have houses with loggias and large, ornately decorated rooms."

The *oecus* connected on each side to two luxurious alcoves and to two other rooms that had beautiful mosaics, now in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples. One represents a cock-fight (Room 44) and the other a partridge stealing a golden mirror from a basket (45).

The wall decoration in one of the *cubicula* (42) pursues a marine theme. The prows of two yellow ships adorn a podium, and in each ship a pair of marine centaurs hold oars. The lower parts of their bodies are formed like fish, while the upper parts are nude and human. Their flowing beards and curly hair echo the waves of the sea, and their ears are pointed like Neptune's.





Perspective reconstruction of the three frescoes in the *oecus* (43) and an axonometric reconstruction of the virtual space that extends away from the *oecus* (drawing by Ludovica Bucci de Santis and Simonetta Capecchi).

Painted decoration on the west wall of Bedroom 46.

Facing page: View of Bedroom 42. The painted decoration on the west wall of the room represents prows of ships placed on podia while marine centaurs hold up the entablature of an Ionic building. The mosaic represents the battle between Theseus and the Minotaur framed with a labyrinth motif.

These marine monsters hold up the architrave of the Ionic architecture. Behind the building and beyond a low curtain, one can see the colonnaded courtyard of a sanctuary.

Cubiculum 46 is divided into an antechamber and a sleeping alcove, as is often the case with bedrooms. Both the wall decoration and the floor mosaics echo this division of the space. The antechamber has a continuous socle (courses of violet blocks between the fictive-marble column bases), and the middle zone above it is decorated with Corinthian columns in the foreground. A Doric peristyle is visible in the background and over the screen of orthostata that closes the space between the Corinthian columns. Two birds perch on a lowered curtain on the upper part of the wall, and one can also see the inside corner of a Doric portico with blue sky between its columns. The wall of the alcove, behind a line of yellow and white Ionic columns, finishes with a series of bosses: a red cornice with rosebuds runs above the black and alabaster orthostata, and above it a zone of square and rectangular bosses in yellow, green, and violet, as well as the head of a satyr, a bust of Eros, caricatured figures (*grylloi*), and a female portrait. The wall is topped with a band of panels and a coffered cornice.



J



Odyssey Landscapes on the Esquiline Hill

ROME

The Odyssey Landscapes were discovered by chance in Rome in 1848 on the Via Graziosa on the Esquiline Hill (today that part of Via Cavour between Via Sforza and Via dei Quattro Cantoni). These works are among the oldest surviving examples of ancient landscape painting.

The fragments represent scenes from the *Odyssey*, and, at the time of the excavation, they were believed to have derived from the upper part of a cryptoporticus, which may have been vaulted. Eight scenes from the cycle are housed today at the Vatican Library, and one other, representing the Siren, is located in the Museo Nazionale Romano.

The individual stories are represented in continuous narratives across a landscape that one views through a fictive window. The frieze is seen as if from above, but this point of view is at odds with the viewer's actual position some five meters (16 ft.) below the paintings.

The human figures in the paintings are minute, and rather than dominating the landscape they seem subordinate to it. This is common in Roman art, where every representation of nature takes on a monumental quality. Vitruvius described this style of representing mythological and epic nature with landscapes that were themselves grandiose and epic (*De Architectura* 7.5.2).

The paintings are traditionally dated to about 50–40 B.C. (based on the underlying *opus reticulatum* masonry), but they are based on Hellenistic models.

The frieze represents the wanderings of Odysseus and his companions as they try to return home to Ithaca. A number of episodes of that legend are represented; they are faithful to the Homeric text and are often accompanied by captions written in Greek. The first six scenes depict stories of the journey through the land of Laestrygonians, with the most space dedicated to Odysseus's adventures with the sorceress Circe and the Shades. The last two scenes tell the story of the Nekyia, Odysseus's descent into the Underworld, during which he interrogates the soul of Tiresias to learn about his return home (Vatican Museums), and about his adventures among the rocks of the Siren (Museo Nazionale Romano).

The pilasters framing the scene in the palace of Circe are viewed as if from head on, from which we deduce that this must have been the central scene: in the other scenes, the perspective slant of the pilasters becomes more acute toward the ends of the wall. The windows are represented as sections of a continuous frieze rather than autonomous compositions, and the individual stories often escape the confines of a single window. For example, the adventure in the land of the Laestrygonians begins in the middle of the second window and ends in the first half of the fifth. Indeed the pilaster strips framing the windows seem to be laid over the landscape, blocking our view of certain objects. The pilaster between the second and third scenes, for instance, obscures the trunk of a tree, leaving us a view only of its branches; it also partially covers the flock of goats on the left and the figures in the background on the right. Theoretically, if we could move the pilaster, we would be able to see all of these objects in their entirety.

Despite these interruptions, it is the landscape itself—a series of uninterrupted mountains with occasional views of the sea—that brings a real sense of coherency to the narrative and unites the separate scenes into a whole. The device of continuous narrative is used within the individual

episodes as well as in the frieze as a whole. In the fourth section, for example, Odysseus's ship escapes the brutal violence of Laestrygonians and in the same scene heads off on its voyage to Circe's domain. In the seventh section there is a Shade lying on the ground, while on the other slope of the mountain the entrance to Hades and the afterlife opens up. Similarly, we see Odysseus on the threshold of Circe's palace—the only interior to be represented—while to the right he is forcing the sorceress to return his men. This scene is one of the most meaningful examples of the device of continuous narrative, and Franz Wickhoff (though he mistakenly dated these works to the Trajan period) recognized it as typical of Roman art.

These frescoes were cleaned years ago by the Vatican Museums in order to remove the nineteenth-century restorations; this project had to be stopped, however, because so very little of the original remained. Still, the restoration demonstrated that many of the golden brown and green-blue colors were the work of nineteenth-century restorers and that the landscape was originally much less "Romantic" in its appearance. This sense of the original was confirmed by the publication of a little-noted fragment of the frieze (today in the Museo Nazionale Romano), which, because it was in the hands of the private Gorga Collection, had escaped the attentions of the nineteenth-century restorers.

The central painting, depicting Circe's palace, is compositionally and stylistically different than the rest of the frieze. Its "interior" setting, carefully constructed in perspective, interrupts the open sense of the surrounding landscape. It is also the only scene in which the elegance of the continuous narrative is tarnished by an actual repetition of the subject, a repetition that seems, moreover, rather redundant (Odysseus at the door, Odysseus next to Circe). Its point of view appears lower than elsewhere, and the presence in the sanctuary of a *baitilos* (sacred stone) and other cult objects suggest a symbolic and religious character foreign to the rest of the cycle, which seems more purely and simply a narrative. This difference might be explained if we see the central scene as a Roman addition to the original narrative model. The scene with Circe could have reminded a Roman audience of the existing link between this Greek myth and their own history. According to legend, the children of Odysseus and Circe founded Preneste and Tusculum just as Aeneas's founded Rome.

Page 93: Odyssey Landscapes on the Esquiline Hill.
Right side of *Odysseus in Hades* (Vatican, Vatican
Library, Room of the Aldobrandini Marriage).

Pages 94–95: Odyssey Landscapes on the Esquiline
Hill. Left side of *Odysseus in the Land of the
Laestrygones* (Vatican, Vatican Library, Room of the
Aldobrandini Marriage).

Pages 96–97: Odyssey Landscapes on the Esquiline
Hill. Right side of *Odysseus in the Land of the
Laestrygones* (Vatican, Vatican Library, Room of the
Aldobrandini Marriage).

Pages 98–99: Odyssey Landscapes on the Esquiline
Hill. Left side of *Odysseus in Hades* (Vatican, Vatican
Library, Room of the Aldobrandini Marriage).



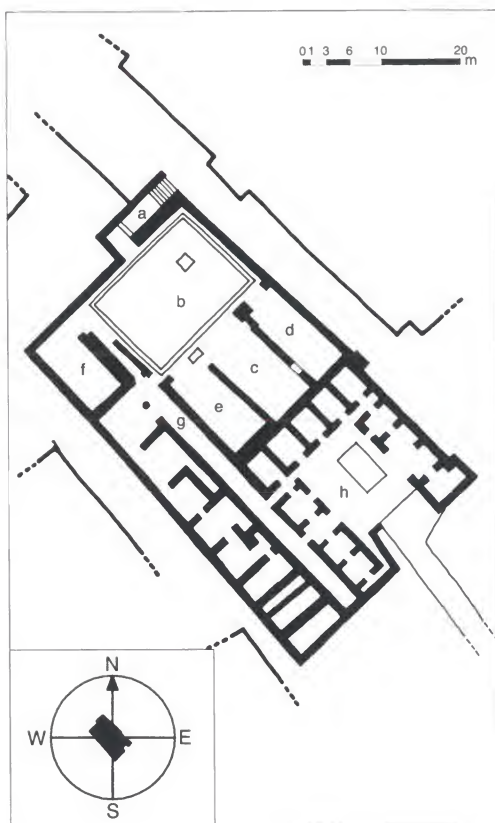






The House of Livia on the Palatine Hill

ROME



Plan of the House of Livia on the Palatine Hill

- a. Descending corridor (A)
- b. Atrium (B)
- c. *Tablinum* (C)
- d. Room (D)
- e. Room (E)
- f. *Triclinium* (F)

Facing page: Left wall of Room E. The fresco represents a portico of columns with vegetal shafts and garlands of fruits and foliage that hang between them. The yellow-ground frieze represents scenes from life along the Nile River.

The remains of a late-republican house are visible on the Palatine Hill near Tiberius's Palace. Pietro Rossi excavated the structure in 1869, under the auspices of Napoleon III. The house's owner has been identified as Livia, wife of Emperor Augustus, because of the discovery of a lead water pipe (*fistula aquaria*), today in the *tablinum*, stamped with the name "Iulia Aug(usta)." Not all scholars agree on this identification, however.

The original walls, built in an irregular *opus reticulatum*, are dated to the first half of the first century B.C. (ca. 75–50). The paintings, on the other hand, seem to represent a mature Second Style and should be dated to about 30 B.C.

The evidence we have today suggests that this *domus* underwent a number of changes to its original plan. It seems, for example, that the principal entrance originally opened on the east side of the building and was later walled up; that there may have been an atrium where the remains of an *impluvium* were discovered; and that the section of the house one can now visit and that seems to have been its principal part may at first have been only a secondary area accessible by a long corridor. In this case, the *tablinum* (C) was originally the passageway between the two blocks of the house, and only later was it closed at its eastern side and painted, like the two rooms beside it (D, E), with the lovely Second Style decoration.

The house was built on the slope of a hill, below the terrace upon which the nearby Temple of Magna Mater was built; it is, therefore, entered by means of a corridor (A) that slopes down to a second atrium (B) in which we find two piers that must have supported a roof. Four rooms open onto this space; the one in the center (C) is larger than the two next to it (D, E). The room (F) on the right side of the atrium was the *triclinium*.

The decoration of the *tablinum* (C) suggests that it was the most important room of the house. Three detached Corinthian columns on high bases make a colonnade that divides the wall into three sections. The columns support a coffered ceiling represented in perspective, and the whole scheme seems obviously to derive from theatrical sets. Three doors occupy the center of each section, and the middle one opens onto a mythical scene. The lateral doors, represented with their shutters open, allow a glimpse of cityscapes with figures in the background. Small genre pictures hang from the projecting cornices halfway up the wall, and there are small decorative elements everywhere, including sphinxes, winged divinities, floral clusters, and candelabra. The right wall is the best preserved. At its center is a small *aedicula* in which we see Io, one of Zeus's lovers, being freed from Argus's prison by Hermes. Hera had placed Io under Argus's guard in order to save her from her husband's attentions, but Hermes used trickery to free Io so that Zeus, appearing to her in the form of a bull, might possess her. In this scene the young woman is sitting at the base of a statue; she is being watched by Argus, and Hermes appears on the left as he comes to liberate her. The picture is probably a copy of a famous work by the Greek painter Nikias. On the left wall and opposite the room's entrance, the nymph Galatea is represented fleeing from Polyphemus on a seahorse. Today this picture has all but faded away, although it was in good condition when it was first discovered.

The fairly well-preserved decoration of the left wall of Room E, to the right of the *tablinum*, offers a simpler division of the surface. The room is conceived as if it were surrounded by a portico of columns on fantastical bases, whose shafts are made of vegetal forms. Beyond the columns is a low, projecting podium topped by a wall of white orthostata supporting a yellow



entablature. Above, large, open windows reveal fantastical plantlike figures. Rich garlands of fruit and leaves hang between the columns in the middle zone; and objects of rural life, symbols of the cult of Dionysus, hang from them. The beautiful frieze with a yellow ground above depicts scenes of Egyptian life along the Nile; they are executed in a fresh style that uses an impressionistic painting technique of dabs and highlights. We can make out travelers, camels, and a statue of Isis-Fortuna with a cornucopia.

In room (D), to the left of the *tablinum*, the painted ornamentation is similar to the other rooms, although it has no figures. The decoration consists of columns and pilasters above a fictive marble dado.

The large room (F) is generally identified as the *triclinium*, and its painted decoration is also preserved. A landscape at the center of the wall opposite the entrance has an aniconic simulacrum of Diana.

The paintings in the House of Livia constitute one of the most elegant and interesting examples of late Second Style decoration. It has come a long way, for example, from the realistic and massive architecture of the decoration at Oplontis, Boscoreale, or the Villa of Mysteries. It was perhaps also this kind of decoration that the contemporary architect Vitruvius, as someone who designed real buildings, felt moved to criticize. He saw the insipid *appagineculi* (a term that cannot be adequately translated, but that may refer to the architectural elements that are transmogrified into plant forms) as an expression of the irrational, of something that “does not exist and cannot exist.” In a few years Augustan classicism, already incipient in all forms of Roman art, would manifest itself in the delicate, geometric forms of the Third Pompeian Style.

Painted decoration of the east wall of the *tablinum* (C) with a central *aedicula* with mythological scenes: Hermes frees the youthful Io from the prison where Hera had placed her, under Argus's guard, to keep her away from her husband Zeus.

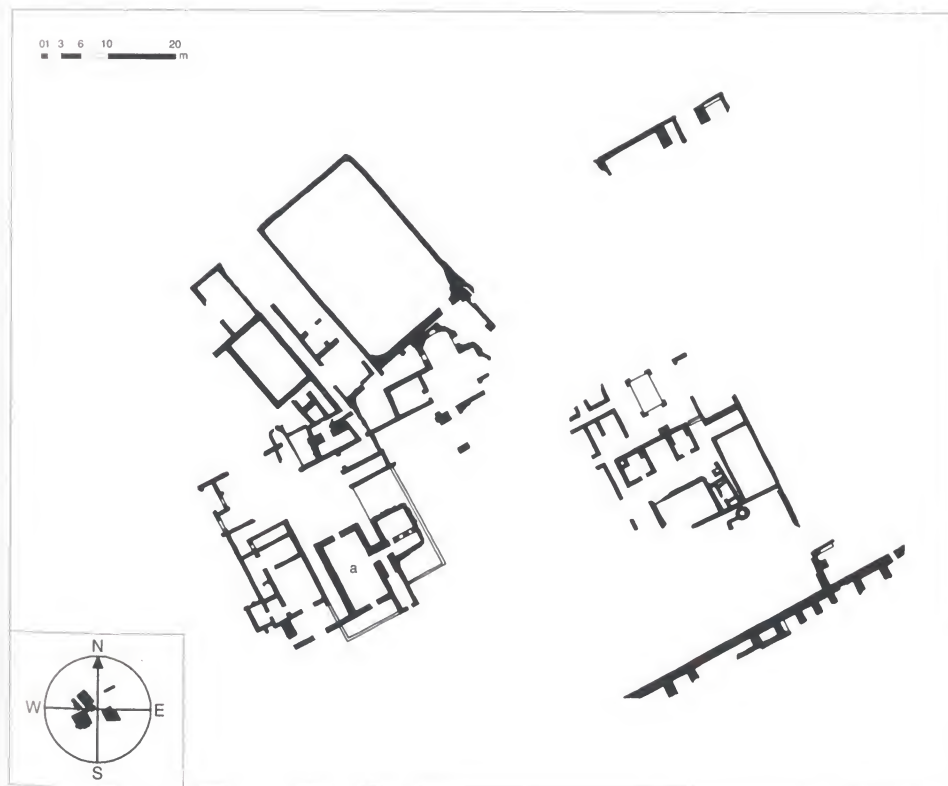


Livia's Villa at Prima Porta

ROME

This villa is located about fifteen kilometers (9 miles) outside of Rome in the suburb of Prima Porta; it is about 14,000 square meters (150,000 sq. ft.) and thus one of the largest in Latium. The villa belonged to Livia Drusilla, wife of Augustus. The site was chosen, according to Suetonius, because it was here that an eagle dropped into the empress's lap a white hen bearing a laurel branch in its mouth. This legend also explains why some sources refer to the villa as "ad Gallinas Albas" (of the white hens): "Just after she married Augustus, Livia was visiting Veio when an eagle flying over dropped a white hen in her lap." The haruspices whom the empress consulted decided that the laurel branch should be planted; its berries gave rise to the forest of laurel next to the villa. The bay used in the triumphal laurel wreaths of the imperial family came from this forest, which also became a symbol of its prosperity. In Nero's time a devastating fire destroyed both the woods and the sacred white hens.

The large building has been famous since the nineteenth century for the exceptional quality of its finds, including the famous statue of *Augustus of Prima Porta*, today in the Vatican Museum, as well as for the garden motifs in the paintings of its subterranean dining room.



Plan of the Villa of Livia at Prima Porta
a. Subterranean *triclinium* (G) with its
imaginary garden.



The long east wall of the subterranean *triclinium* at the Villa of Livia, with its painted decoration representing a garden (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme).

Work was taken up again in 1980 to excavate and organize the site, and it has revealed a monument characterized by sophisticated architecture and splendid decorations, including many mosaics and wall paintings of the highest quality.

The spectacular painted garden (5.9 × 11.7 m, or 19 × 38 ft.) of the windowless underground dining room constitutes one of the great monuments of Roman art. It was transferred to the Museo Nazionale Romano in 1955, although it was also exhibited, after its restoration, at the Palazzo Massimo. The wall documents a painting type—the representation of a garden—that was intended on the one hand as an “imaginary paradise” and on the other as an elegant collection of rare botanical specimens. It seems to the viewer that the room is surrounded by a pathway marked in the foreground by a reed fence and behind by a stone wall. Rhythmically the wall spreads out into the shape of an exedra, in which individual trees stand out: a pine, an oak, and four firs. The background is crowded with rich vegetation including laurel in a variety of forms, from a low bush to a tall tree trunk, but also fir trees, cypress, turkey oaks, pomegranates, quince trees, and date palms. Flowering baskets of roses, poppies, chrysanthemums, violets, and irises complement the dense growth of shrubs—oleanders, myrtle, boxwood, and laurel.

The birds among the foliage include nightingales, orioles, magpies, swallows, blackbirds, and many other species. A cage on the balustrade contains a canary, which calls to mind the aviary described by Varro at his villa at Casinum.

The upper edge of the wall is painted as a rough brown outcrop of stone, an indication that the painted garden was being viewed from inside a grotto: the spectator imagines that he is inside a natural cave facing a walled garden, which might evoke the idea of a summer dining room. Moreover the absence of human figures, like the grotto scene painted in the *cubiculum* of the Villa of Publius Fannius Synistor at Boscoreale, makes sense only when one takes into account the direct involvement of the spectator. This pleasant landscape, rich with trees, flowers, and birds of all kinds, can be linked with the specific tastes of the imperial court of the day (the ancient



sources recount that Augustus owned a talking magpie as well as a crow and a parrot). But it can also be seen in relation to the *Ara Pacis Augustae* and thus to the messages of prosperity and well-being encoded into Augustan art in support of the new imperial regime. One might note, for example, that all the plants seem to be in bloom simultaneously, a symbolic allusion to the prosperity of the Imperial age. At this particular moment in history—Ovid was writing his *Metamorphoses* in this period—the theme of the garden might allude to the perpetual peace guaranteed by Augustus. Indeed the clear sky and the plants bursting with flowers and birds constitute a sort of *Sagra di Primavera*, like that in the preface of Lucretius's poem sanctioning the power of Venus, the divine mother of Aeneas and his line: that is, of Caesar and Augustus. The decoration, which indicates the transition from the Second to the Third Style, can be dated stylistically to between 20 and 10 B.C.

A view of the subterranean *triclinium* at the Villa of Livia with painted decorations of a garden. The short north wall faces the viewer (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme).

Pages 106–7: The Villa of Livia at Prima Porta: *Triclinium* with an illusionistic garden, the short, south wall (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme).

Pages 108–9: The Villa of Livia at Prima Porta: *Triclinium* with an illusionistic garden. Detail of the right side of the short north wall (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme).





The Villa Farnesina

ROME

Plan of the Villa Farnesina

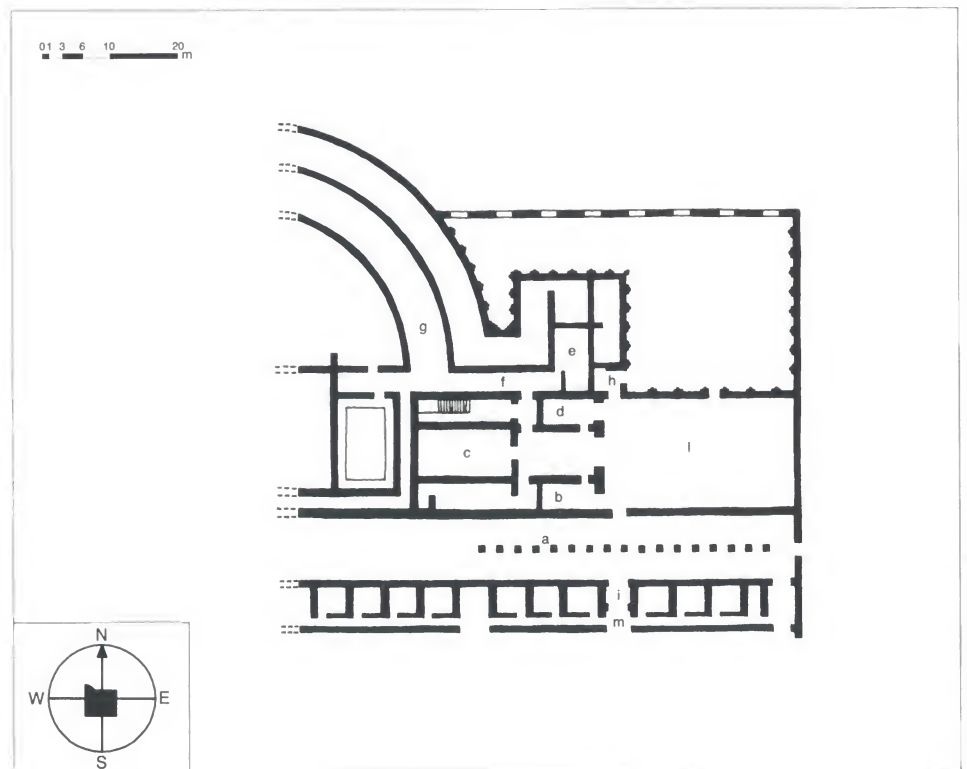
- a. Cryptoporticus (A)
- b. Bedroom B
- c. *Triclinium* (C)
- d. Bedroom D
- e. Bedroom E
- f. Corridor F
- g. Corridor G
- i. *Fauces*
- m. Vestibule

Facing page: Bedroom B. View of the left wall of the antechamber and the rear wall of the sleeping alcove (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme).

The murals of Pompeii and Herculaneum represent an impressive documentation of Roman fresco paintings. Rome, on the other hand, has very few pictorial cycles, but what survives there is of the highest artistic quality and thus exceptionally important. Patrons of the arts in Rome were often highly cultured urban aristocrats and even members of the imperial family. Such is the case with the frescoes from Livia's Villa at Prima Porta and the Villa Farnesina, all of which are now housed in the Museo Nazionale Romano in the Palazzo Massimo alle Terme.

The Villa Farnesina, which some scholars think was built by Agrippa in 21 B.C. to celebrate his marriage to Julia, daughter of the emperor Augustus, displayed one of the most refined examples of Roman domestic decoration. It is dated to the transitional period between the Roman Republic and the Imperial age, which coincides with the transition from the Second to the Third Pompeian Style.

This building was excavated in 1879 in the gardens of the sixteenth-century Villa Farnesina along the Lungotevere during a project to build embankments for the Tiber River. The residence consisted of two symmetrical wings flanking a large hemicycle, and it was built on the banks of the river in a suburban area dotted with villas and gardens. Agrippa built a bridge to







Section of the painted decoration with a white ground in Corridor F (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme).

connect the villa with the opposite bank of the river. This area was not greatly favored by Roman home builders, who preferred the slopes of the Janiculum Hill or the area that now borders the Vatican. The neighborhood of Trastevere was populated instead with artisans, many of whom were foreigners from the Near East who stored their goods in nearby warehouses. Indeed the wine warehouses owned by the imperial family—the *cellae vinariae Nova et Arruntiana*—were discovered on one of the properties adjacent to the Villa Farnesina.

The only decorations of the villa to survive (frescoes, ceiling stuccos, and fragments of mosaic floors) come from its southern wing, which was in a better state of preservation at the time the buildings were unearthed. Our knowledge of the whole complex is handicapped by the loss of the excavators' original graphic documentation and is based only on their written descriptions. We also know that, during the excavation, art collectors and dealers stood at the perimeter fence, ready to bribe workers for the art, and indeed some fragments from the villa are now lodged in Tübingen, Germany.

Paintings from nine rooms have been preserved, and four of them have been completely reconstructed. We have decorations from three *cubicula* (B, D, E), the dining room (C), the vestibule (M), the *fauces* or entryway (I), the cryptoporticus (A), the garden, and the corridor (F, G), as well as fragments whose original location can no longer be determined. Parts of the lovely white stucco vaults of the bedrooms are also preserved.

A reconstruction of the building complex allows us to understand better the choice of decorative schema and their relationship to the function of the spaces they embellish. Thus, for example, in the *cubicula* the antechamber and sleeping alcove were characterized by different types of vaulting and decoration. Coordinating, repetitive decorations were used in the corridors, which were really rooms used as passageways. Similarly, erotic subjects appeared in the bedrooms, and a garden setting adorned the *viridarium* that was located in front of the dining room. Finally, black



seems to have been used systematically in the *triclinium* in order to hold the warmth of the sun during the winter. Because it acted as a passageway, the decoration of the cryptoporticus (A) is repetitive; its architectural system is anchored by a rich, colored socle interrupted by the projecting bases of columns whose vegetal shafts leaf out in a series of *aediculae*. The back wall is composed of flat white orthostata, centered with small pictures of mystical subjects. Several of these pictures, sixteen of which survive, were restored as early as the first century A.D. The entablature above bears figures of Victories and caryatids.

The straight corridor (F), in the section of the villa (G) that curves around the hemicycle, has a simpler decorative system; its large white orthostata are decorated with slender candelabra ending in caryatids that support the delicate tendril of vines. Smaller candelabra emerge from the cylindrical caps (*polos*) that the caryatids wear, and they also enliven the painted frieze on the entablature. The frieze is a landscape painted with rapid brushstrokes, populated by figures in silhouette and interrupted by theater masks and objects related to the Dionysian and mystery religions.

The large winter dining room (C) is decorated with a coordinating scheme against a black ground. The repetitive program is unified by a succession of candelabra whose vegetal shafts hang with plane-tree branches and ivy. The details vary considerably, however. The individual orthostata, polished to a mirror finish, are decorated with tenuously painted sacro-idyllic landscapes in an Alexandrian style, which are crowded with the small figures of sailors and travelers. Pliny records that the artists Ludius and Studius were responsible for this “compendiary” technique, that is, creating essential features with short brushstrokes. They were famous for the speed with which they could paint landscapes and figures.

The most unusual element of the cycle comes in the narrative frieze under the entablature, with scenes that refer to the pharaoh Bocchoris (735–728 B.C.), known in the ancient world for

Painted wall decoration with a black ground in the winter dining room (*triclinium* C) (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme).



his knowledge of jurisprudence and the wisdom of his judges. Without any dates it is impossible to identify the episodes narrated in these crowded courtrooms; we can identify only one scene that seems to be a dispute over a mantle and another that records the Judgment of Solomon. The canny use of foreshortening and the play of light—imaginary light coming as if from the door on the southeast wall—is particularly striking.

The mural paintings in the bedrooms, as noted above, show how the decorative schemes were adapted to the architecture, differentiating the structure of the antechamber and the bed alcove. Here there is a certain schematic quality in a pictorial system, based on the unifying principle of dividing the wall into three sections both vertically and horizontally, but the imagination of the artists is given free rein in the variety of both the architectural and figurative repertory. In addition, it is clear that “Egyptomania,” the passion for Egyptian and Alexandrian motifs that dominated Roman artistic production between the end of the Republic and the first Imperial period, was also influential here. Yet the figurative language retains a Neo-Attic flavor, as we see in the masterfully refined linear technique and the repertoire of classical and archaic figures. A manifestly eclectic artistic culture is at play here, in the service of the new lords of the world.

Cubiculum B has the best-preserved decoration in the villa. The back wall of the bed alcove frames an unusually small *aedicula* with a scene of the *Young Dionysus and the Nymphs of Nisa*, and on the left wall of the antechamber we find a *Toilet of Venus*. Perspective renderings open the wall up illusionistically: fantastical architecture, pavilions containing *pinakes* with shutters, genre scenes, and scenes with erotic and Dionysian subjects. The whole was composed with great elegance.

The symmetrical bedroom (D) is similar to the other in its decorative program, but its panel paintings are less well preserved. The name of the Greek-Asiatic artist Seleukos is inscribed on the shaft of a column on the right wall. The central *aedicula* of the antechamber contains the noble figure of Venus, seated in profile on a throne with a foot rest. The style of the painting

recalls the technique of white-ground Attic vase painting (*lekythoi*) of the fifth century B.C. The central picture on the rear wall of the bed alcove shows three female figures intent on making a sacrifice in front of a herm with an erect member. There are simple candelabra inside the *aediculae* on the lateral walls of the bed alcove. The scenes in the small, shuttered paintings are much more lively; they were inserted in the attic and their subjects derive from the sphere of intimate conversation or a contained eroticism that did not transgress the new morality promoted by the emperor Augustus. They also include girls at play with small animals.

Room E is the largest of the three *cubicula*. Here too we find delicate decoration but in this case painted against a white ground, which seems to take us into a feminine realm. The composition combines the repetitive motifs of the antechamber with numerous sacro-idyllic scenes in the bed alcove, where the decoration seems dense with allegorical content. On the rear wall of the sleeping alcove are two representations of Artemis, one as Luna (Selene) and the other as Diana the Huntress, flanking an *aedicula* with a scene of a traveler making an offering to a statue of Athena. Paired processions of female silhouettes, rendered in pastel shades, are located in the *pinakes* at the center of the orthostata on the lateral walls, while the two central *pinakes* show seated maidens, one of whom concentrates on pouring perfume into a small glass container.

The decorative repertory of the Villa Farnesina seems to be based on stylistic motifs taken from Augustan propaganda. The Egyptian themes that appear throughout the villa, as we have seen, can be tied to the Egyptomania that was widespread at the time of Cleopatra's visit to Rome in 46 B.C., and that revived after 31 B.C., when Egypt submitted to Rome after Octavius defeated Anthony and Cleopatra. Other elements carry more precise political messages, such as the winged Victories in the stucco vaults, the battles between griffins and Arimaspeans (one-eyed creatures of the far north), and the explicit stucco portrait of Augustus as *novus Mercurius* in the vault of *cubiculum* D.

Bedroom E, view of the left and rear walls (Rome, Museo Nazionale Romano, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme).



Page 117: The Villa Farnesina. Detail of the painted decoration in Bedroom B. Mask crowned with a diadem.

Pages 118–19: The Villa Farnesina. View of the left wall of the antechamber in Bedroom B. The painting at the center represents the *Toilet of Venus*.

Pages 120–21: The Villa Farnesina. Detail of the painted decoration in Corridor G with a landscape.







The Villa Imperiale

POMPEII

Plan of the Villa Imperiale at Pompeii

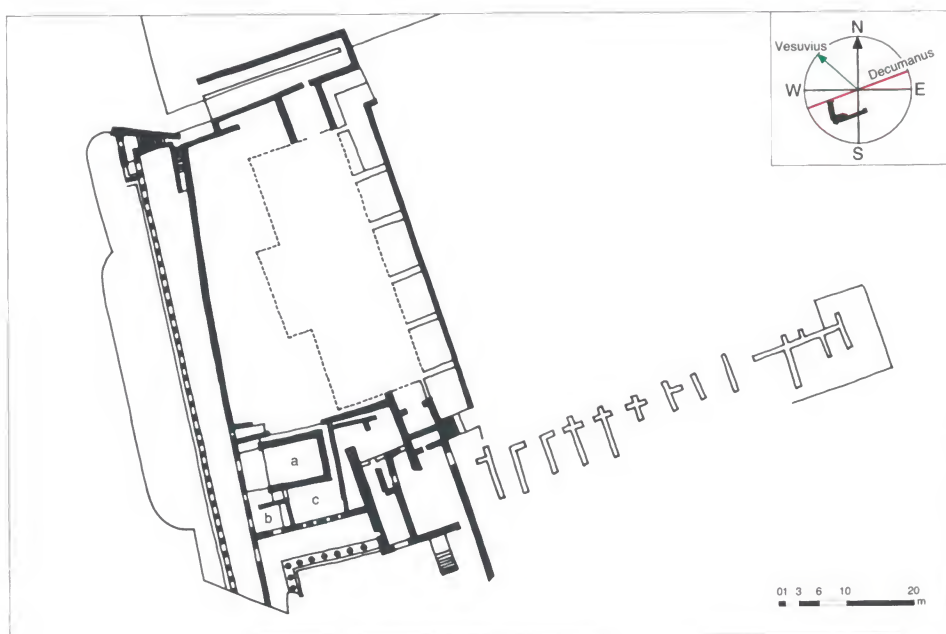
- a. *Oecus* (A)
- b. Bedroom (B)
- c. *Triclinium* (C)

Facing page: Third Style wall painting in the *oecus* (A).
The *aedicula* at the center has a painting of *Daedalus*
and *Icarus*.

The Villa Imperiale is one of the most important building complexes at Pompeii, both because of its enormous size and for the superb quality of its decoration. It was built illegally by private interests in the last decade of the first century B.C., on state land just inside the city wall next to the Porta Marina and below the Temple of Venus. Renovated in the Fourth Style after the earthquake of 62 A.D., the area was reacquired as public property and the villa was in large part destroyed to make way for the construction of grain warehouses. This reacquisition likely took place in A.D. 73–74, the year of the census ordered by Vespasian and Titus, and it might have been included among the responsibilities assigned to Titus Suedius Clemente, the imperial prefect sent to Pompeii to revamp the city's real-estate registry and to reclaim for the state any public lands that had been usurped by private interests.

The building, which has a podium or *basis villae*, was probably a two-story house. The ground floor would have corresponded to what we see today at the level of the portico, and the second floor, now completely destroyed, reached the level of the Antiquarium.

The design and decoration of this villa far outstrip the mediocre, provincial framework of the city of Pompeii, and its grandiose architectural plan parallels the beauty of its painted walls. The cycle of Third Style paintings reveals the refined and elegant character of the building and betrays the cultured tastes and elevated social status of its owners. One needs to imagine that it was executed by a cultivated workshop active in the last decade of the first century B.C., one that was able to blend tradition and novelty, elegance and high culture. Although





Coffered barrel vault with stuccoed decorations in the *oecus* (A).

Facing page: View of the entire *oecus* (A).



the villa needed restoration after the earthquake of A.D. 62, the new decorators were aware of the special quality of the earlier Third Style paintings and, wherever possible, they saved them, integrating them into the Fourth Style renovations.

The surviving parts of the villa consist, essentially, of an *oecus* (A), a *diaeta* (B), a dining room (C), a long portico (c), and part of a peristyle (D). A careful study of the building has demonstrated that the architecture and its Third Style decoration constitute a single project that must, furthermore, have been the creative product of a single architect.

The *oecus* is a rectangular vaulted hall six meters wide by seven and a half meters long and some eight meters high ($20 \times 25 \times 26$ ft.). It is decorated in the Third Style, with architecture that is still strongly linked to the late Second Style, while the black-ground paintings in the vault and the upper register of the wall are Fourth Style. It seems that the original vault did not withstand the earthquake in A.D. 62 and was restored shortly afterward.

The Third Style decoration consists, in the lower register, of a black socle above a red porphyry base divided by thin, geometrical lines. The middle area of the wall has a small *aedicula* with a mythological scene at the center of each wall. Perimeter walls that flank the *aediculae* consist of red panels and slender columns that support caryatids, which stand out against a white ground. A series of six small paintings or *pinakes*—all portraits of poets—is also placed against this white ground. The intermediate zone between the two registers, corresponding to the base of the columns, is made up of predella panels comprising a long, low frieze with repeating figures of Eros and Psyche. The upper part of the wall was replaced with an elegant Fourth Style decoration with Bacchantes and slender architectural elements on a black ground.

The figurative parts of the decoration consist of three groups: the three pictures in the small *aediculae*, the six *pinakes*, and the frieze. The subjects of the three paintings come from the Cretan







Third Style painted decoration in the *triclinium* (C) with a sacro-idyllic landscape.

Facing page: Third Style painted decoration against a white ground in the bedroom (B).

Page 128: The Villa Imperiale: Third Style painting in the *oecus* (A) with a scene of *Theseus and the Minotaur*.

Page 129: The Villa Imperiale: Detail of the stucco decoration from the coffered barrel vault in the *oecus* (A).

Page 130: The Villa Imperiale: Detail of *Theseus and the Minotaur*.

Page 131: The Villa Imperiale: Detail of *Theseus and the Minotaur*.

cycle and represent *Daedalus and Icarus*, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, and *Theseus Abandoning Ariadne on Naxos*. Small captions written in Greek appear next to the figures.

In the painting of *Daedalus and Icarus* on the south wall, the young hero lies shattered on the ground; he is accompanied by a grieving nymph while his father Daedalus continues to fly above. This picture is the most beautiful among ten different versions of the same story at Pompeii.

In the scene of *Theseus and the Minotaur* on the east center wall, we see the fallen monster in the foreground while the heroic figure of Theseus, surrounded by the grateful youth of Athens, stands out in the background. Two nymphs also participate in the scene; the one on the left corresponds symmetrically to the grieving nymph in the preceding scene. A luminous landscape of houses in the background seems to represent the distant Athenian homeland, as indicated by the presence of an Athena painted in green, possibly a reference to the bronze statue of Promachus displayed at the Acropolis.

The third picture, *Theseus Abandoning Ariadne on Naxos*, on the north wall has many lacunae, but there is enough left to recognize Theseus on his ship, preparing to set sail from Naxos without the soundly sleeping Ariadne.

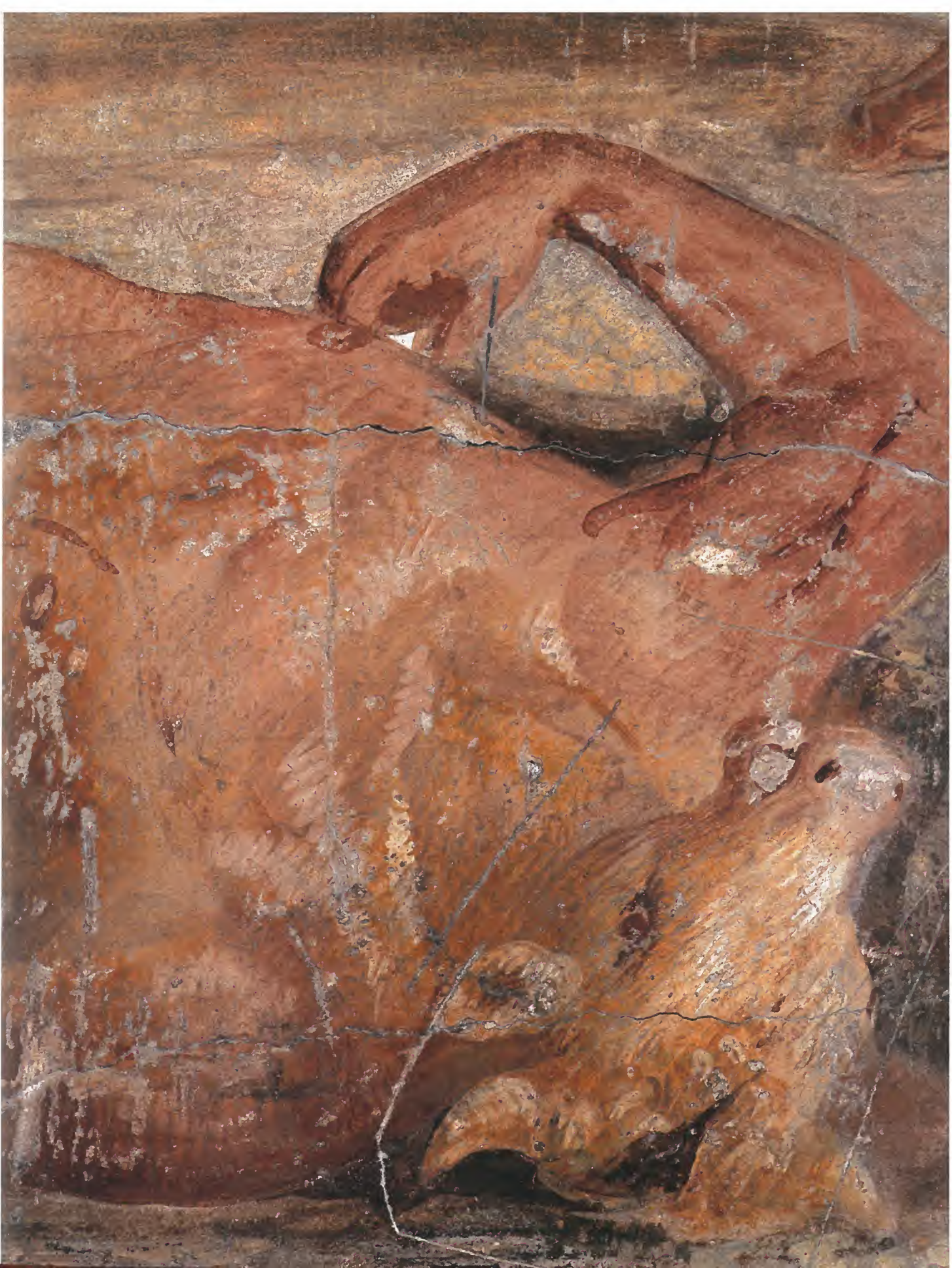
Perhaps this Cretan narrative in a late Julio-Claudian decorative cycle in Campania is merely an erudite reference to the mythical prehistory of this area, that is, of the colonial period that brought art and technology to Italy. In the *Aeneid* (6.14), Virgil recounts that Daedalus, having fled Crete, landed at Cumae where he decorated the doors of the Temple of Apollo with legendary scenes.

Two salient characteristics emerge from an analysis of the decoration in this reception room. The first is the exceptionally high quality of the paintings. The other is that it was worked out according to a preestablished program. Once the figurative motifs for both the theme and the style were selected, they were thoughtfully organized across the wall.









The Villa of Agrippa Postumus

BOSCOTRECASE

Plan of the Villa of Agrippa Postumus

- a. Mythological Room (19)
- b. Red Room (16)
- c. Black Room (15)

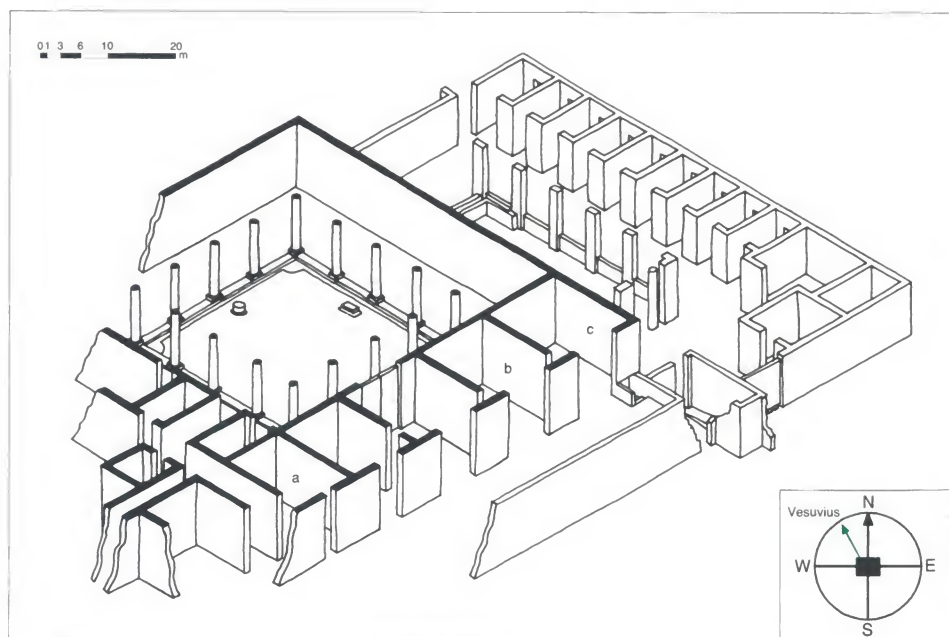
Facing page: View of the group of panels decorated with landscapes in the Red Room (Naples, National Archaeological Museum).

Boscotrecase is a resort to the north of Pompeii on the southern slopes of Mount Vesuvius. In Roman times, the area was dotted with villas and farmhouses, thanks to the natural fertility of the soil. Boscotrecase may also have been part, along with Boscoreale, of the *Pagus Augustus Felix Suburbanus* so often mentioned in the epigraphs.

The villa was discovered between 1903 and 1905 during work on the construction of the Circumvesuviana railway. The brick stamps suggested that it was built by Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa; it was later bequeathed to Agrippa Postumus, who was only a few months old when his father died. Because the heir was such a young child, the property passed instead to his mother, Julia, who was Agrippa's widow and Augustus's daughter.

The building was planned around a huge central peristyle. Its walls were decorated with architectural motifs—that is, in the Second Style—that included illusionistic columns placed to correspond with the real columns of the portico. The *lararium*, here really a small temple dedicated to the cult of the household gods, is located to the left of the entrance.

The decoration, executed in the Third Style in about 10 B.C., represents one of the few secure reference points in the dating of Pompeian painting. We have a roof tile from the villa that bears the inscription “Pupillus Agrippae Tuberi Fabio consulibus.” “Pupillus Agrippae” is the above-mentioned Agrippa Postumus, orphaned son of Agrippa (12 B.C.–A.D. 14) and grandson of Augustus. The graffito scratched into a column shaft in the peristyle confirms this. It says, “Caesaris Augusti femina mater est,” that is, “his mother was the daughter of Caesar Augustus.” Tuber and Fabius were







Above top: Detail of the Black Room with a *pinax* featuring Egyptian motifs.

Above bottom: Detail of the scene of *Perseus and Andromeda* from the Mythological Room (New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art).

consuls in the year 11 B.C. Although he had been adopted by Augustus in A.D. 4, Agrippa Postumus was sent into exile in A.D. 7, and therefore the Third Style decorations at the villa must have been executed before the latter date. Two bronze seals discovered in a wardrobe make reference to an imperial freedman who was probably the villa's last owner—they name him as Tiberius Claudius Euthychus and Euthychi Caesaris Libertus (Euthychus, Caesar's freedman). It is thus also possible that the renovation of the decoration in the residence was undertaken by the new owner in about A.D. 10.

After their excavation, the paintings from three different rooms in the house were sold and shipped to Naples and New York, where they arrived dismembered into some seventeen panels. They comprised the Black Room, which was decorated with slender architecture, vignettes of sacred landscapes, roundels with portraits, and small paintings (*pinakes*) with Egyptianizing elements; the Red Room with large landscape paintings; and the Mythological Room with paintings of *Polyphemus and Galatea* and *Perseus and Andromeda*. The picture of *Polyphemus and Galatea* is positioned at the center of an *aedicula* set between panels crowned by a yellow frieze with Egyptianizing motifs against a black ground. At the center of the panel, set against a red ground, there is a slender, elegant, golden censer with two sphinxes holding garlands. The Nereid Galatea, daughter of Nereus and Doride, was originally the personification of white sea foam. Later the cyclops Polyphemus became enamored of her, but she preferred the young Acis. Polyphemus crushed Acis to death with a rock, and his flowing blood was transformed into the river that bears his name. Opposite this painting is *Perseus and Andromeda*. Andromeda was the daughter of Cepheus, king of the Ethiopians, and his queen Cassiope. When a sea monster threatened the coast of his kingdom, an oracle suggested to Cepheus that he sacrifice his daughter to free his land of this threat. Perseus intervened, however, defeating the monster by showing it the head of Medusa and rescuing Andromeda, whom he then married. This work, which represents the hero flying toward the princess to free her from the sea monster, is one of the oldest surviving representations of this myth. It is perhaps for this reason that the painter surrounded the central scene of Andromeda bound to a rock with many smaller representations that narrate the story in all its details.

The two large landscape panels are today housed in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples. One represents the entire central part of the wall. Its black socle is divided into geometric compartments; the central compartment contains a still life of figs, and there are garlands in the lateral parts. The red middle zone has a central *aedicula* with columns, and an entablature with elaborate polychromed decoration and a sacred landscape. The decorations that frame the lateral panels—small pilasters and string courses—are equally fantastical and lively. The decoration of the upper part of the wall—the acroteria, the vegetal spires on the *aedicula*, and the vine tendrils with small paintings and masks—are very finely executed, demonstrating the miniaturist attention typical of the Third Style.

The central picture represents a rural sanctuary built on a rocky bluff; it emerges against a white background like an island. At its center is a vase resting on a column and a sacred tree. A statue of the draped seated divinity (Cybele?) holds a scepter and a drum. A shepherd to the left stands amid his flock of goats as he leans against a stone block, and to the right two women and a child move toward a sanctuary, holding what may be torches. Behind them is a statue of Priapus standing on a cylindrical base. In the background and beyond the round building in the sanctuary, we can see a walled garden, a small temple with a colonnaded pronaos, and, nearby, a seated traveler. To the right is an *aedicula* with a cypress tree.

The second panel preserves the central part of the wall. The painted socle below is decorated with plants and tendrils hanging from fillets. The painting itself is a very typical "sacred landscape": a simple *aedicula* with fillets and a vase on its entablature, and next to it a tree with liturgical objects—a drum and a thyrsus, for example—hanging from its branches. Two female figures, probably priestesses, are walking through the building. A traveler holding a walking stick sits on a rock in front and to the right of the sanctuary; nearby there is a monument with a tripod. On the other side a shepherd bent over his staff leans against the podium of the building and turns toward his dog. The landscape in the right background has porticoes with small figures, and on the other side we can see buildings with trees, a vase, and a human figure. The whole is executed in a vividly impressionistic style.

The House of the Golden Bracelet

POMPEII

The ancients called the art of gardening *ars topiaria*. Real gardens, designed architecturally, can be found at places like Domitian's palace in Rome, the Villa of Poppea at Oplontis, and Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli. The art of landscaping is also reflected, at least to a certain degree, in ancient wall painting, where it was used to open a vista onto an enchanted world, a *locus amoenus*. This world dematerialized the real walls of the room, and symbolically it freed the house's owner from the concrete concerns of everyday life. Pompeii, like Rome and the Villa of Livia, offers examples of marvelous painted gardens, an indication that this kind of decoration was fashionable throughout the Roman world.

The best example at Pompeii was uncovered only recently in the so-called House of the Golden Bracelet. Constructed panoramically on the western slopes of the hill, this house is representative of the luxury construction that defines the whole of the *Insula Occidentalis*, the area of the city where it is located.

Technically, the House of the Golden Bracelet is located in Regio VI because its southern side lies on axis with the Via delle Terme. Its official name, therefore, is "Pompeii VI 17, Insula Occidentalis 42." It was built on three levels, using the city walls for support, in order to accommodate its sloping lot. The upper floor, with its entrance on the Via Consolare, has a typical *domus* plan with a Tuscanic atrium surrounded by dining rooms and bedrooms. Its outermost elements

View of the house's summer *triclinium*.



are reception rooms and terraces with panoramic views. A stair built along the southern wall of the house connects this floor to the one below.

The house takes its name from a gold bracelet, found on the arm of a rich Roman matron, which weighs an extraordinary 610 grams (21.5 oz.). The bracelet consists of a solid gold two-headed serpent with eyes made of precious stones; its jaws hold a gold disk that is decorated with a bust of Selene silhouetted by a crescent moon and seven stars. The goddess's veil is swept back by the wind, forming a halo behind her.

The skeletons of a family group were discovered during the excavation of the service area of the house. They were two adults and a young child who sought shelter beneath a staircase, where they met their deaths. The fact that none of them wears any jewelry suggests that they may have been servants.

The painted garden is part of a larger composition that decorated three walls of a room that opened onto the real garden. It is a refined composition, with theater masks hanging from the ceiling, which includes plants and animals as well as marble fountains, herms painted with Silenus figures, and colored marble reliefs that show recumbent maenads.

These pictures, like the house itself on its panoramic perch, express the great love the Romans had for nature, a sensibility they inherited from the Hellenistic world. For the ancients, gardens were sacred places, fitting venues for the many statues of divinities, nymphs, and Pan that were placed there.

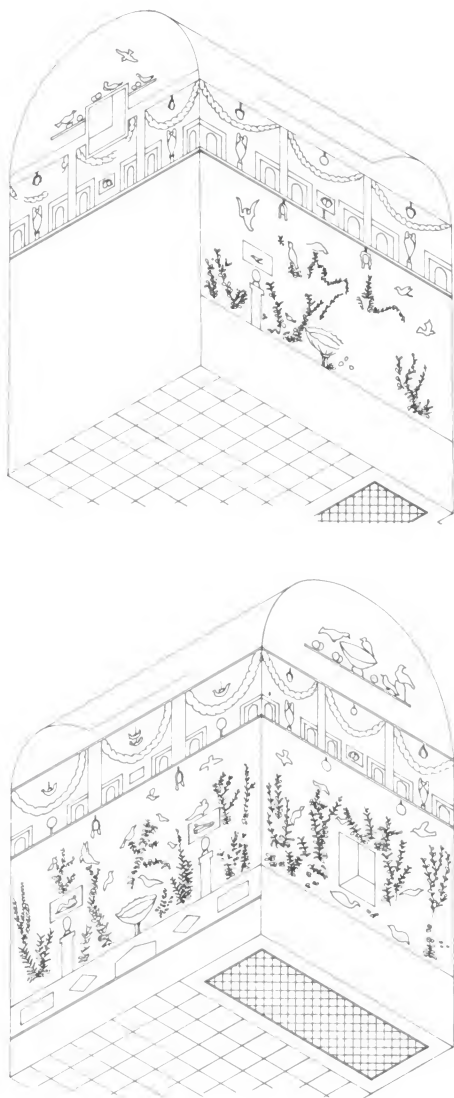
The illusionistic technique used to paint the garden gives it an extraordinary realism, enhanced by carefully detailed renderings of the plants and animals. Yet each element also has symbolic meaning. Date palms, for example, were associated with victory and immortality. Laurel was sacred to Apollo, the strawberry tree (*Arbutus unedo*) stood for eternity, viburnum was used in triumphs, the poppy was beloved by Demeter, and the pine tree was a symbol of fecundity, while poisonous oleander symbolized death, and the rose love. Every species of birds represented—doves, thrushes, sparrows, swifts, crows, and nightingales—also carried symbolic meaning. The viewer stands astonished in front of this picture, overcome by an emotion akin to what one feels looking at Botticelli's *Primavera*, and still one continues to descry new images among the very refined details of the painting.

The dating of the work is based on the Julio-Claudian style of the coiffure of the young female herm, who wears a braid on the top of her head. This type of styling was fashionable in the first half of the first century A.D., although the painting is thought to date more specifically to the mature Third Style, about A.D. 25–50.

The 1983 excavation in the garden produced an exceptional find: a myriad of tiny fragments that, once they were reassembled, revealed a refined Third Style wall painting that was composed of a socle, a middle register, and an upper zone. This was apparently an earlier decoration that was destroyed, possibly because of damage sustained in the earthquake of A.D. 62, and its fragments tossed into the water channel in the garden. The socle offers a practically inexhaustible richness of decorative detail, especially in its flora and fauna, with *kantharoi*, greyhounds, hares, and so on. The central square bears a very rare image of the poet Euphorion set against a black ground. He was mentioned among the Alexandrian epigramists who came back into vogue during the reign of Tiberius, who himself wrote poetry and was an enthusiastic reader of the erudite Hellenistic poets. Euphorion appears on the left side of the picture; he wears a white *himation* and the unkempt beard of an intellectual; in his right hand, he holds an ivy wreath, a literary prize. There is a young servant at the center of the composition; he is nude except for a short red cloak, and he holds a plate of offerings and a pitcher. We can see the figure of a muse behind and to the right; she is intent on reading a wax tablet.

The wall to the left of the picture, painted with a red ground, is painted with a luxuriant garden of ivy, grapevines, wild white roses, oleanders, and apple and pine trees. A head of Silenus, some panpipes, a silver *situla* or bucket, and many other objects associated with the cult of Dionysus emerge from the dense vegetation.

Reconstruction drawings of the *oecus*.





The panel with the painting is capped by a decorative molding surmounted by a row of hearts. The black band is divided into architectural panels that are decorated with griffins and cavorting Bacchantes: an old satyr plays the double flute, and a maenad a lyre for the benefit of two other nymphs.

Detail of the Third Style predella.

The lateral panels included portrait paintings; the right side is still preserved and includes, in the foreground, two figures flanking a window. They may be the wealthy owners of the house. The young patron is portrayed wearing a diadem on her head and with a diptych in her hand. Her husband wears a short red cloak and an ivy crown. A young girl who may be their daughter appears behind them.

This must have been a very rich family, and one apparently not ruined by the disastrous earthquake in A.D. 62, since they left behind a notable hoard of coins and jewels including forty *aurei* and 170 silver *denari*. These evidently were scattered when they fell from a wooden storage chest that a servant was trying to bear away from the collapsing house. The bearer was one of the four victims found at the foot of the stair leading to the garden, killed as they tried to flee.

Page 139: The Villa of Agrippa Postumus. Rural landscape with a shrine. Detail of the painted decoration in the Red Room (Naples, National Archaeological Museum).

Pages 140–41: The House of the Golden Bracelet. Painted decoration representing a garden.

Pages 142–43: The House of the Golden Bracelet. Detail of the painted decoration representing a garden: a herm carrying a relief.







The House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto

POMPEII

Plan of the House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto

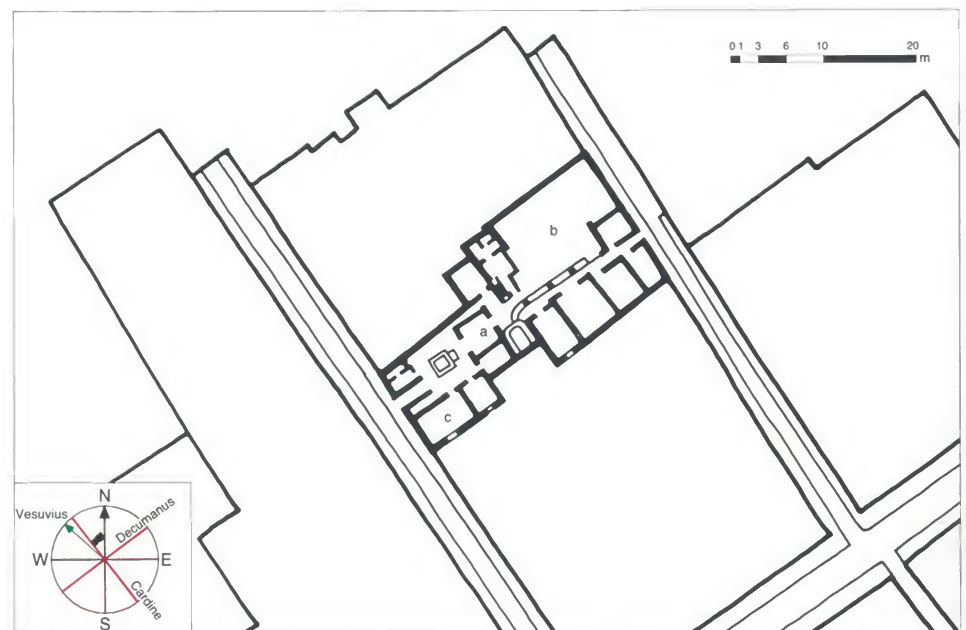
- a. *Tablinum* (h)
- b. Garden (l)
- c. *Triclinium* (f)

Facing page: View of the atrium and the *tablinum*.

The House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto is situated on the small street of the same name that runs off the Via di Nola in Pompeii's northeast sector. The walls of its *tablinum* represent one of the city's richest and most refined examples of Third Style decoration, both for its composition and for its repertoire of ornamental motifs.

The only stylistically anomalous element is the socle, which seems to have been designed without any reference to the rest of the wall; it shows a foreshortened view of a fenced garden against a black ground, with kraters arranged at the center. The violet frieze above the socle is divided into the canonical three parts corresponding to the partition of the wall above, and it is decorated with small, slender arched structures inhabited by panthers; there are vases between the arches and, in the central panel, small yellow squares with birds painted inside them.

The middle zone has a central *aedicula* that is almost completely flat; its straight entablature is decorated with heart-shaped motifs. At the center of a red carpet painted against a black ground we find a mythological scene representing the triumph of Dionysus, who is accompanied by Ariadne in a chariot drawn by bulls. Their entourage surrounds them: Silenus on his ass, a satyr with a flute, and two dancing Bacchantes. At the sides, two vertical compartments decorated with garlands of leaves, fruit, and a variety of objects (drinking horns, lyres, and paterae, for instance) open up in an architectural structure that seems to sweep back behind the central panel, while its lower parts are covered by red *aediculae*. The lateral black-ground panels are decorated with candelabra; the one on the right is multi-tiered, like a tall stack of vases, while the one on the left twists upward like the stem of a caduceus. Both candelabra have small pictures or *pinakes*—views of villas—tacked on about halfway up.





Third Style decoration of the north wall of the *tablinum*. The central picture represents the story of Ares and Aphrodite.

Facing page: Painted bedroom decoration with a representation of Narcissus admiring his reflection in a pool of water.

The upper zone of the wall is articulated in a three-part scene, the central part of which is also divided into three areas. At the center a tripod, painted against a red ground, takes up the center of a building with an atrium covered by a *compluvium*. This central panel is flanked by two fictive doors that stand ajar, with griffin acroteria standing guard. Two symmetrical pavilions, one in each of the lateral panels, are crowned with pergolas, and each structure shelters a vase. Placed rather awkwardly at the center of the upper part of the wall and beneath the tripod is a small still life of fish spilling from a broken basket.

The central picture on the north wall represents a scene from the story of the lovers Ares and Aphrodite. Ares, wearing a helmet, surprises the seated goddess, reaching out a hand to touch her breast. The story is set in a columned interior with a window and a door in the background. Cupid stands at the center of the composition, with his bow canted in the pose invented by the Greek sculp-



tor Lysippos, and two maids are seated on a low seat to the right. Behind the *kline* is a surprised-looking youth representing Helios, with two wings sprouting from his brow. This painting is more than a mere copy, though there is another, almost identical representation of this scene in House I 7.19. Indeed it appears to be extremely refined; it has vibrant, subtle colors and is well above the average quality of most Pompeian decoration.

The decorative scheme in the garden (*viridarium*) has a black base ornamented with tufts of vegetation; the red middle zone rests on this base and has large, open fictive windows that



East wall of the winter *triclinium* with a representation of Orestes killing Neoptolemus in front of the temple at Delphi.

reveal a hunt scene with wild beasts and other animals—a deer, a horse attacked by a tiger, a wild boar, and a lion in a landscape of trees and rocks. White garden statues repose in front of the window uprights; they include a nymph holding a fountain. The upper part of the wall is decorated with a geometric motif of green, white, red, and yellow squares in five courses, arranged like a chessboard.

The painting on the east wall of the winter dining room represents the murder of Neoptolemus at Delphi, a story that derives from Euripides' *Andromache*. Neoptolemus, draped in a short red cloak, is stabbed by Orestes on the altar of Apollo in front of the temple dedicated to the same god (and here represented as an Italic building). Orestes is accompanied by Pylades, represented as an awkwardly small figure carrying a spear. Hermione, wife of Neoptolemus and once promised to Orestes, has fallen to her knees on the ground, upsetting the sacrificial vessels (an *oinochoe* and a *patera*). She forms the base of compositional pyramid that is probably Hellenistic in origin. Cupids fly in the lateral panels; they carry lances and trophies and appear to celebrate the love of Orestes and Hermione painted on the same wall.





Left and below: Garden (*viridarium*) with frescoes that represent scenes of hunting wild beasts and other animals.

Page 150: The House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto. Detail of the painting of Ares and Aphrodite on the north wall of the *tablinum*. Ares, wearing a helmet, reaches out to touch Aphrodite, who is seated in front of him.

Page 151: The House of Marcus Lucretius Fronto. Detail of the painting of Ares and Aphrodite on the north wall of the *tablinum*. Eros and three other figures watch Ares and Aphrodite.

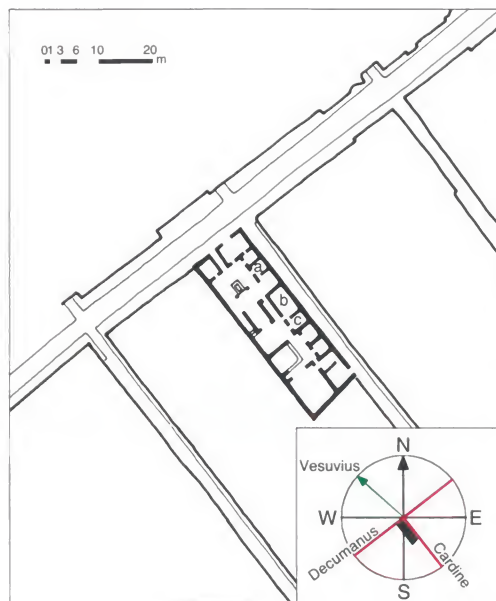






The House of the Orchard

POMPEII



Plan of the House of the Orchard at Pompeii

- a. Blue Bedroom (8)
- b. Triclinium (11)
- c. Black Bedroom (12)

Facing page: Painted decoration in the Blue Bedroom that includes the representation of a garden. The objects in the garden derive from Egyptian religious cults.

“Suddenly there came into our view today the Alexandrian ships, — I mean those that are usually sent ahead to announce the coming of the fleet; they are called ‘mail-boats.’ The Campanians delight to see them; all the rabble of Puteoli wait on the docks. . . .” This is Seneca’s description (*Letters* 17) of the triumphal arrival in A.D. 64 of a convoy of about 400 ships at Pozzuoli after a voyage of some ten days. The convoy was under the escort of a special fleet, the *Classis Augusta Alexandrina*, charged with defending the grain transports destined for Rome. Every year twenty million *modii* (the equivalent of 1,396,000 metric tons) of grain—enough to feed the city for about four months—reached the capital by way of the port of Pozzuoli. Other goods, destined to sate the city’s appetite for luxury goods, were also imported from Egypt, including stone from the quarries at Syene (syenite) and Memphis, granite from Mons Claudianus, basalt, porphyry, and serpentine. Gemstones were also imported—emeralds, topaz, amethyst, and onyx—as were papyrus, once the monopoly of the Ptolemies and now of the emperor, textiles, and even Nile sand, used in the Roman gladiatorial schools. Products from more distant lands were also gathered at Alexandria for export to Italy, items like incense and perfume from Arabia, cotton and ivory from India, and silk from China.

The first regular contacts between Campania and Egypt date to the Hellenistic period. These contacts were indirect, however, mediated via the Aegean world into which the Ptolemies had extended their economic interests. The island of Delos, for example, was an international market frequented by traders from Alexandria, and, from the second century B.C., it was also the most important center for the cults of Isis and Serapis in the Aegean. (Indeed, there were three *serapea* at Delos.) It was through the Campanian merchants there who converted to the Egyptian-Alexandrian cults that the Egyptian beliefs gained a portal into their Italian homeland in the early second century B.C. Later, Roman interests in the eastern Mediterranean and in Ptolemaic Egypt made Pozzuoli Italy’s gateway to the east as well as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious trading center.

It was probably the colony of Alexandrians in Pozzuoli that was responsible for the construction of the Serapeum noted in an inscription dated 105 B.C., a structure that unfortunately can no longer be identified. This building is not the same as the more famous so-called Serapeum, a building constructed in the first or second century A.D. and that was in fact nothing more than a market in which a statue of Serapis was discovered. The Alexandrian merchants, whose first base in Campania was at Pozzuoli, soon moved elsewhere along the coast. Augustus’s official annexation of the Ptolemaic kingdom in 30 B.C. marked the beginning of a new and more intense commercial and cultural relationship between Roman Campania and Egypt. The Egyptian gods Isis and Horus-Harpocrates, for example, became protectors of domestic hearths there, alongside the Roman deities. The artistic culture of ancient Egypt also had an impact; its exotic natural environment was especially useful to decorators, and here one need only think of the many Nilotic landscapes, such as those in the House of Livia in Rome and the House of the Ceii in Pompeii. Examples of Egyptianizing objects in private collections became ever more common, as we see at the House of the “Bel Cortile” at Herculaneum. This widespread fad for all things Egyptian, with the large numbers of Egyptian antiquities imported into Italy, made it unlikely that Roman and Campanian artists would remain untouched by the influence of the



pharaonic aesthetic canon. Nor is it surprising that they should try to imitate its more striking stylistic characteristics. This “Egyptomania” in ancient Rome may be compared to the craze for *chinoiserie* in Europe in the eighteenth century after China opened its doors to the outside world.

Pompeii had followers of the goddess Isis from the second century B.C., and they built a lovely temple dedicated to her near the Samnite Palaestra—the first building to be restored after the earthquake of A.D. 62. Nor is it surprising to find motifs alluding to the Egyptian religions all over Pompeii; examples are found in the House of Decimus Octavius Quartio, the Villa of the Mysteries, and the House of the Golden Cupids, among others. Some of the finest examples, however, come from the House of the Orchard—also called the House of the “Cubicoli Fioriti”—which is located at the southern end of a street that crosses the Via dell’Abbondanza (I 9.5), not far from the Large Palaestra.

Here we find two bedrooms painted with garden scenes. In one the paintings are set against a sky-blue ground and in the other against a black ground, and both are rich with objects that pertain to these eastern cults. The bedrooms are reminiscent of real altars dedicated to the syncretic god Bacchus-Osiris, mystic god of vegetation and the resurrection, and to Isis. The question remains, however, whether these spaces were dedicated to cult practices or simply represent a trend in interior decoration.

The decoration was likely executed by the same artist who worked in the House of the Golden Bracelet. The Blue Bedroom was conceived as a white pergola immersed in a garden of shrubs and trees, including laurel, myrtle, oleander, palms, lemons, cherries, and strawberry trees. Birds are everywhere; they recall the birds of *ba*, Egyptian symbols of the immortal soul, and they include blackbirds, magpies, swallows, and turtledoves. On the pergola, in addition to sketches of funerary urns, are two paintings that represent the bull Apis carrying the solar disk between his horns and the ankh, the key of life, around his neck, and another two that represent scenes of sacrifice. Garlands that terminate in theater masks and marble disks (*oscilla*) hang from the stucco cornices. White marble statues are hidden among the vegetation in the lateral panels; they are rigid Egyptian statues of figures, either seated or standing on pedestals, wearing the *ureaus*—the cobra headdress—and holding scepters and ankhs. The central compartments of the garden are decorated with *pinakes* of Dionysian scenes. The ones above depict Egyptian sacrifices: in one we see an incense burner with horns at its corners, numerous examples of which may be found in the museums of Cairo and Alexandria.

In the Black Bedroom, another ancient Egyptian motif—the serpent—is painted on axis with the doorway, seizing the trunk of a fig tree. Snakes in ancient Egypt were symbols of life underground, carried reverently in baskets during processions, and both gods and kings wore likenesses of these sacred animals in their crowns.

The rich orchard in this picture, composed of plum, lemon, strawberry, sorb apple, and pear trees, is surrounded by a wooden trellis. Inside are cult objects associated with the worship of Isis, including marble vases and a golden *hydria*, or water jug, set with precious stones and featuring a cobra-shaped handle. The *hydria* sits on a wreath of rose petals set in a sumptuous vegetal marble stand. Such vessels, containing the sacred waters of the Nile, were often represented in the hands of an offering bearer. The *hydria* was a distinctive object associated with the initiates of Isis.

The ceiling of this bedroom is covered with a pergola of roses. Bacchus is shown at the center, riding a panther and surrounded by flying cupids and his attributes, including theater masks, musical instruments, *oscilla*, and drinking horns (*rhyta*) that hang from vine tendrils. It is hard not to envy the Pompeians who dined on their couches beneath such a pergola! The paintings here can be dated for stylistic reasons to the Imperial period. The room must have been decorated before the great earthquake in A.D. 62, however, because the window on the south wall had been bricked up but not yet covered over with plaster.

The dining room next to these *cubicula* is divided into an antechamber and a banqueting room. In the latter, three couches were arranged around a table that was carefully placed to correspond to a small mosaic carpet with an eight-pointed star. Reclining on their couches, dinner guests could admire the paintings of *The Fall of Icarus*, a *Battle of Two Warriors*, and *Acteon Attacked by His Dogs*. The lateral panels have small scenes of Alexandrian sanctuaries.



Painted decoration of the Blue Bedroom.

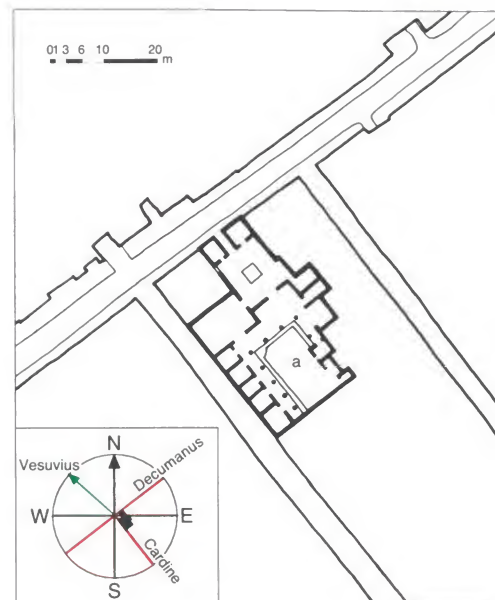
The House of the Marine Venus

POMPEII

This house, located on the last stretch of the Via dell'Abbondanza toward the Porta di Sarno, was damaged by bombing in 1943, and it was not excavated until 1952. The plan of the house essentially centers around its garden.

The painting on the rear wall of the garden shows the birth of Venus. The goddess reclines like a pearl on a vast cockleshell, and cupids on either side sport in the water. The goddess's coiffure is of a style fashionable during Nero's reign. Nearby we find a painting of her lover Mars as a marble statue, and depictions of marble basins with doves, birds that were sacred to Venus.

The nude Venus is painted awkwardly, but she still has something of a theatrical effect when seen from afar. She holds a fan in her right hand, and her veil billows like a sail in the wind behind her. She wears gold jewelry—a diadem, a necklace, and bracelets at her wrists and ankles. The overall form of the decoration, divided into panels and painted with fictive curtains, seems not to take the real architecture into account; painters were in general reluctant to subordinate their decorative schemes to existing architectural divisions. This house was still being restored after the damage it sustained in the earthquake of A.D. 62: One room was plastered but not yet painted when it was destroyed in A.D. 79.



Above: Plan of the House of the Marine Venus at Pompeii
a. Peristyle (8)



Left: Rear wall of the peristyle with a representation of the birth of Venus, who is carried ashore on a cockleshell.

View of the peristyle.

Facing page: Left side of the rear wall of the peristyle with a garden scene and a statue of Mars.

Pages 158–59: The House of the Marine Venus. Detail of the central panel of the rear wall of the peristyle. Venus, born of the sea, is carried ashore on a cockleshell in the presence of cupids.







The Domus Aurea

ROME

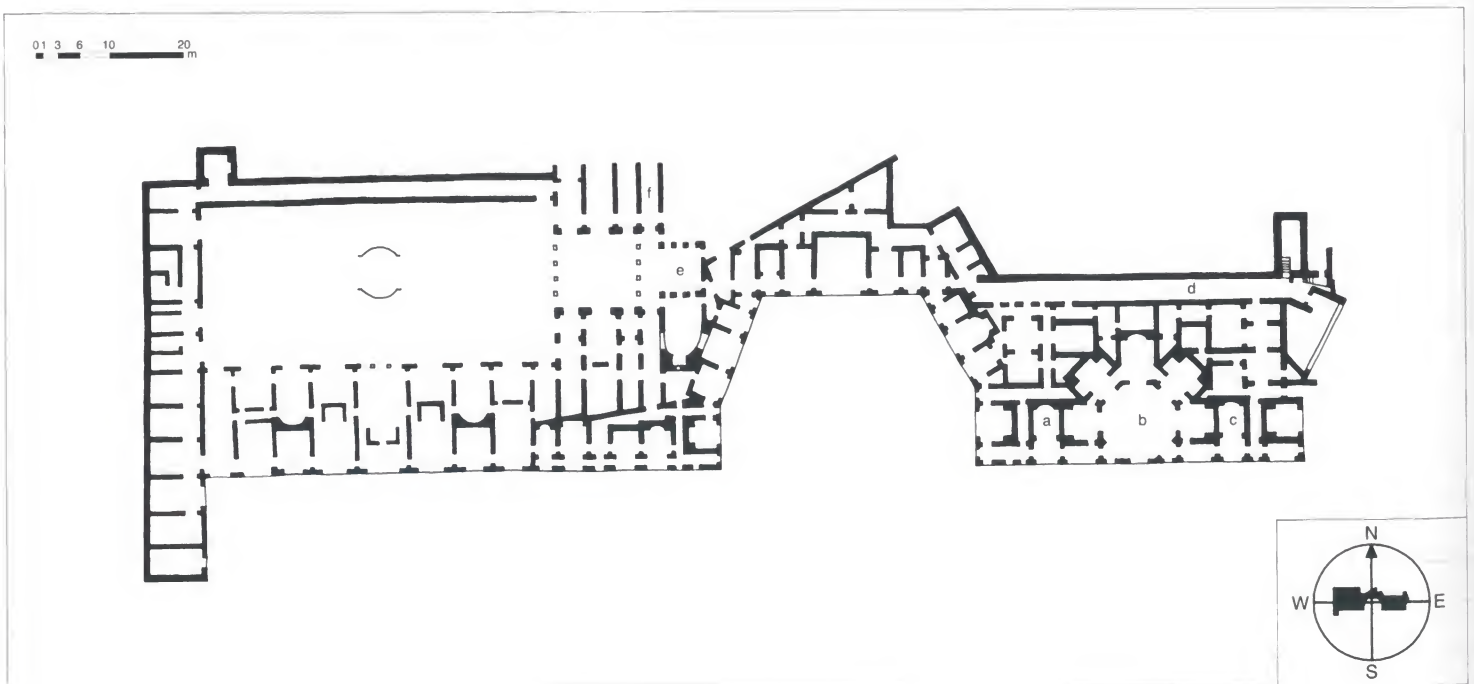
Plan of the Domus Aurea

- a. Room of Achilles at Skyros (119)
- b. Octagonal hall (128)
- c. Room of Hector and Andromache (129)
- d. Cryptoporticus (92)
- e. Nymphaeum of Polyphemus (45)
- f. Room (42)

Facing page: The octagonal hall (128) with its oculus at the center of the canopy vault.

A passage in Suetonius (*Nero* 31) gives us a fairly precise idea of this building:

There was nothing, however, in which [Nero] was more ruinously prodigal than in building. He made a palace extending all the way from the Palatine to the Esquiline, which at first he called the House of Passage, but when it was burned shortly after its completion and rebuilt, the Golden House. Its size and splendor will be sufficiently indicated by the following details. Its vestibule was large enough to contain a colossal statue of the emperor a hundred and twenty feet high; and it was so extensive that it had a triple colonnade a mile long. There was a pond too, like a sea, surrounded with buildings to represent cities, besides tracts of country, varied by tilled fields, vineyards, pastures and woods, with great numbers of wild and domestic animals. In the rest of the house all parts were overlaid with gold and adorned with gems and mother-of-pearl. There were dining-rooms with fretted ceilings of ivory, whose panels could turn and shower down flowers and were fitted with pipes for sprinkling the guests with perfumes. The main banquet hall was circular and constantly revolved day and night, like the heavens. He had baths supplied with sea water and sulfur water. When the edifice was finished in this style and he dedicated it, he deigned to say nothing more in the way of approval than that he was at last beginning to be housed like a human being (Trans. J. C. Rolfe).





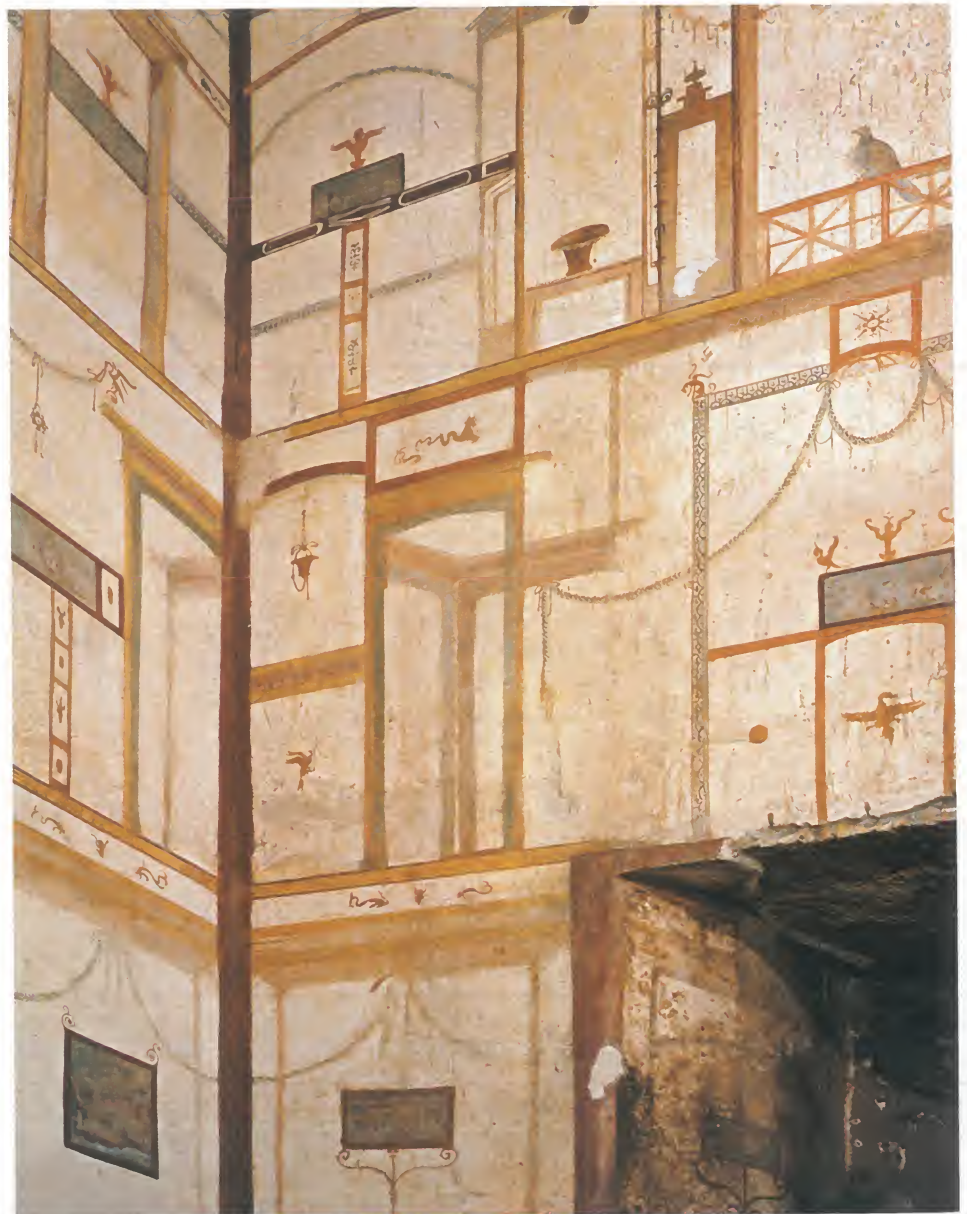
In the first years of his reign, Nero had the Domus Transitoria built to connect the imperial holdings on the Palatine Hill with those on the Esquiline (the Gardens of the Mecenate). This building was entirely consumed by the disastrous fire of A.D. 64. Afterward Nero decided to build what would be by far the largest of the imperial residences, the Domus Aurea.

The building's architects were Severus and Celerus, and the painted decoration was executed by a certain Fabullus (or Famulus). Numerous statues from Greece and Asia Minor were used to decorate the palace; the emperor especially liked the "baroque" style of the Hellenistic groups from Pergamum. Several Roman authors recorded the impact of this construction, expropriating much of the center of the city. Here is Suetonius: "Roma domus fiet: Veios migrate Quirites, / si non et Veios occupat ista domus" (The Palace is spreading and swallowing Rome! / Let us all flee to Veii and make it our home. / Yet the Palace is growing so damnably fast / That it threatens to gobble up Veii at last [*Nero* 39, trans. Robert Graves]).

Martial estimated that the area of the Domus Aurea was approximately eighty hectares (198 acres); it stretched from the Palatine to the Velia (where the vestibule, later the site of the Temple

Cryptoporticus (92) with Fourth Style painted decoration.

Facing page: Detail of the Nymphaeum of Polyphemus (45) with a representation of Odysseus offering a cup of wine to the Cyclops in the central medallion.

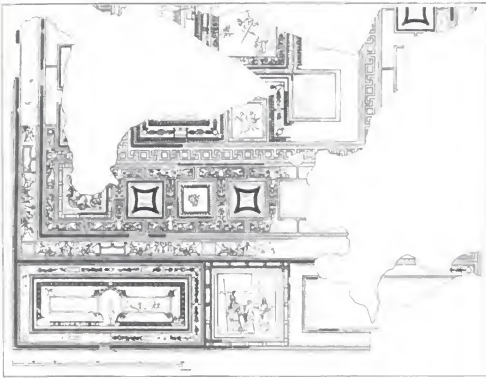




of Venus and Roma, was located). It passed near current-day San Pietro in Montorio, following the Via delle Sette Salle. To the east, it followed the line of the Severan Walls to the Celian Hill, where the Temple of Claudius, converted into a nymphaeum, constituted the southern point of the complex. From this point it turned back toward the Palatine, incorporating the entire valley of the Colosseum, which was then nothing but swampland. The entrance was planned on axis with the Via Sacra at the top of the Velia, and at its center was Zeodoros's colossal statue of Nero, which, according to Pliny, was 119 feet high (about 35 m).

Of all this enormous complex, more like a villa than a palace, only the pavilion on the Oppian Hill remains (about 300×190 m or 984×623 ft.). This part of the Domus Aurea contains certain additions and restorations that confirm the tradition that work on the building continued under the emperor Otho and perhaps also under Titus. In any case, this wing of the house was occupied until A.D. 104, when it was destroyed by fire. Afterward it was covered by the Baths of Trajan.

Nothing remains of the splendor of the palace's marble revetments, of its furnishings or the glitter of the abundant precious metals. Indeed a visit to the ruins of the Domus Aurea is sometimes disappointing, although the architectural spaces are certainly grandiose. The palace suffered what was effectively a *damnatio memoriae*—the damnation of Nero's memory; it was later rebuilt by the emperor Titus, but finally it was broken up by the construction of the Baths and what remains today is largely from that building's first level.



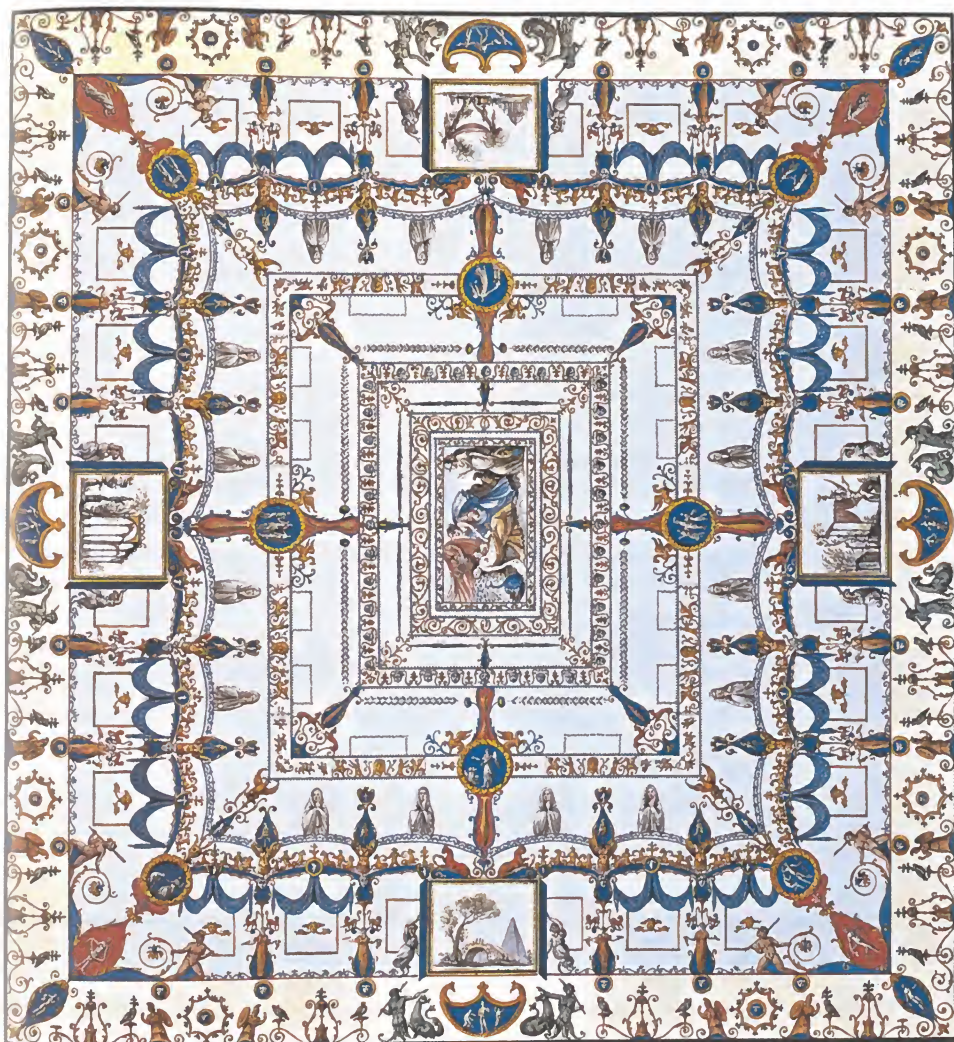
The plan of the Domus Aurea suggests that its two parts were quite different. The western part was a self-contained structure organized around a large, rectangular courtyard. The other, to the east, was comprised of spaces around a large, polygonal recess followed by spaces that radiated out from an octagonal room. It seems clear that the eastern part was added later.

The extraordinary quality of the decoration is apparent from the few fragments of the paintings that survive and that can be associated with Renaissance-era drawings of the more complete works. Many of the artists who drew them, including Raphael, came to these “grottoes” for inspiration, and the decorative motifs they invented were named “grotteschi” after them. The largest areas of surviving painting (and even these are in the process of fading away completely) are found in the Sala Absidiata (10), the Room of the Yellow Vault (8), and the Room of the Owl Vault. Pliny described the artist Fabullus in the midst of his labors here as dignified and dressed in his toga even when he was up on the scaffolding, and he called his style *floridus* and *humidus*. Pliny defined florid colors as blue, blood red, grass green, indigo, golden yellow, and lead white, and these are all the colors one finds in these paintings. By *humidus*, on the other hand, he meant the softness of the painter’s touch.

Facing page, top: Graphic reconstruction of the stuccoed and painted decoration of the vault in the Room of Hector and Andromache (129).

Facing page, bottom: Detail of the vault in the Room of Hector and Andromache (129).

The decoration of the Room of the Owl Vault (Mirri, *Le antiche camere delle terme di Tito* . . . , 1776).



Murecine

POMPEII

Plan of the North Wing of Murecine

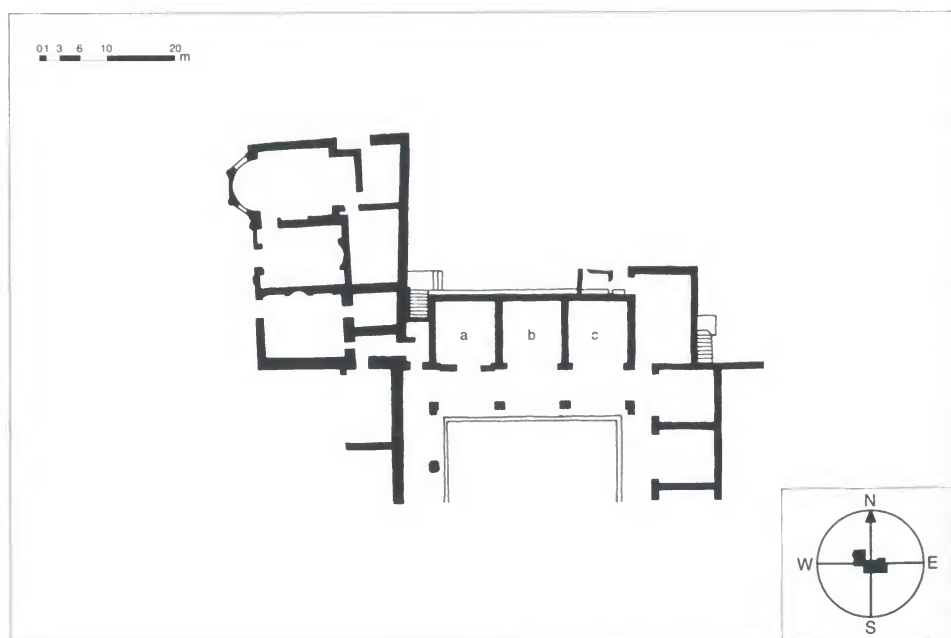
- a. *Triclinium* (A)
- b. *Triclinium* (B)
- c. *Triclinium* (C)

The Murecine complex is located 600 meters (1,970 ft.) beyond the southern edge of Pompeii, on the north bank of the Sarno River. It was discovered in April 1959 during the widening of the Naples–Salerno highway. The excavation unearthed parts of a building, later identified as a *porticus triplex* (a portico with three arms), with dining rooms and a thermal bath complex. The dig, which was made more complicated by the waterlogged stratum in which the structure was submerged for much of its height, also revealed splendid frescoes that were later detached and a collection of wax tablets identified as the accounts of the Sulpicius family of Puteoli. In 1999 and 2000, a second excavation at the site uncovered the building's kitchen, porticoes, and *viridarium*. The entire complex was built in *opus reticulatum* with brick facing. Two staircases, one in the northwest corner of the peristyle and the other on the opposite side, reveal that the building had a second story.

The decoration of the *porticus triplex* was executed in the Fourth Style and was probably painted before the earthquake in A.D. 62. It seems that the complex was not in use when Mount Vesuvius erupted, since the majority of its rooms were being used for storage.

Several hypotheses have been advanced as to the original function of this building. It may have been a seaside house, a hotel, or more likely the headquarters of a business connected with the nearby port.

Triclinium A was explored in 1959. It is also called the Triclinium of the Muses because the figures in the middle register of its red walls have been identified as Apollo and the Muses.





Triclinium A, east wall.

The center of the north wall is occupied by the flying figure of Apollo with his lyre. The god, crowned with a laurel wreath and wearing a light blue mantle, is flanked by Clio, the muse of history, who holds an inscribed scroll, and on the right by Euterpe, muse of dance and the tragic chorus, who is identified by her double flute. Calliope, the muse of lyric poetry, is at the center of the west wall, holding a diptych and stylus. Erato, muse of love poetry, is to Calliope's left. The area to the right is now vacant, but it must originally have contained the figure of Polymnia, muse of the mimic art. Thalia, muse of comedy, is at the center with comic masks and a shepherd's crook, while Melpomene, the muse of tragedy, is represented to the right with a tragic mask and a club. Finally Urania, muse of astronomy, is to the left with her celestial globe and rod. A ninth muse, perhaps Terpsichore, muse of singing, is missing, perhaps because her symbolic role was assumed by Apollo. Each figure is framed by foreshortened architecture.

The decoration in *Triclinium B*, painted against a black ground, is missing in many areas. This dining room is also called the Triclinium of the Dioscuri because it contains a representation of these hero twins, Castor and Pollux. The Dioscuri are represented as white marble statues seen in three-quarter profile on the lateral walls. One wears a tunic and short cloak, the other just a tunic, and each holds a horse by the halter. The north wall has an *aedicula* at the center of an architectural scene, in which a large, draped female figure is partially visible. A servant sits at her feet adjusting her robes. She may easily be identified as Helen, given the presence of her twin brothers on the sidewalls. It has been recently suggested, however, that this figure might represent Venus accompanied by the young Claudia, the daughter of Nero who was deified in A.D. 63. Excavators discovered a rowboat and a wicker basket containing waxed tablets in this room in 1959.

Triclinium C is the most complete of the three and its masonry couches, plumbing, and marble revetment are preserved intact. The decoration, painted against a red ground, has the same compositional and chromatic scheme as *Triclinium A*. It is also called the Sarno Triclinium because the figure represented at the center of the north wall has been identified as personifying the Sarno River. This god is partially reclined, and the girdle of a blue mantle covers his lower body. He holds a reed in his right hand while his left grips the amphora from which the life-giving waters of the river pour forth. A female figure on the left sprinkles perfume while

Triclinium B, west wall

Facing page, top: Triclinium C, west wall

Facing page, bottom: Triclinium C, east wall

a heroic nude youth nearby is holding a bow and a drinking vessel. A winged Victory stands out at the center of the west wall. She wears a green chiton and her armor includes a spear, a helmet, and a golden shield. A poet in a brown chiton holding a *volumen* (scroll) is represented to the right of the Victory, and to the left is a female figure on a pedestal, much of it missing. The center of the east wall is also occupied by a winged Victory; it was detached during the 1959 excavation campaign and has now been returned to its original location. She holds a tall, golden tripod in her hands. There is a maenad to the left with a thyrsus and a tambourine, while to the right is another nude hero with bow and drinking vessel.

The discovery of this complex marked one of the most important archaeological events of the last decades. The beauty of its decoration has led to the improbable suggestion that this may have been Nero's residence during his hypothetical visit to Pompeii. It is more likely that it was the elegant headquarters of one of the many business enterprises present in this area. The remains of a person fleeing the devastating eruption of Vesuvius were found near this complex. He or she was carrying a small basket of pharmaceuticals and a cache of jewels, the most impressive of which is an armilla in the form of a serpent and inscribed "Dominus ancillae suae" ("the master to his slave girl").





Page 171: Murceine. *Triclinium* A, also called the Triclinium of the Muses. North wall: Detail of Apollo wearing a crown and playing the cithar.

Page 172: Murecine. *Triclinium* C, also called the Sarno Triclinium. East wall: Detail of the Victory with a Delphic tripod.

Page 173: Murecine. *Triclinium* C. West wall. Detail of the Victory with a shield and spear in her left hand and a helmet in her right.

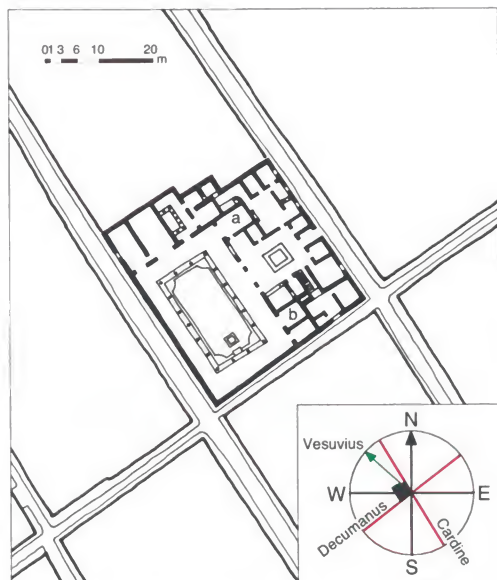






The House of the Vettii

POMPEII



Plan of the House of the Vettii

- a. *Oecus* P, The Room of Ixion
- b. *Oecus* N, The Room of Pentheus

Facing page: View of the atrium and the peristyle beyond it.

The Domus Aurea had an important influence on the decorative fashions of its time, including in middle-class homes. Characteristic of this taste was an overabundance of fantastical architecture and crowds of figures in fields opened up by the architectural structure of the wall. Yet the pictures, frieze decorations, *pinakes*, and other elements all worked together as an ensemble, intended to express a message. Themes in these decorative cycles were often moralizing, since the myths depicted could be seen as archetypes of human affairs.

The decoration of the House of the Vettii is the most famous and sumptuous example of the Fourth Style at Pompeii. The house is located just to the north of the House of the Faun, and it displays the heights of luxury and refinement achieved by the wealthy merchant class in the city in the first century A.D. Like many other houses in the city, it was damaged by the earthquake of A.D. 62.

A painted Priapus in a Phrygian cap greets visitors in the entryway; he rests his phallos on one side of a balance and uses a bag of money as a counterweight. The image seems to declare that “it’s worth its weight in gold,” and indeed in an agrarian society like that of ancient Pompeii, failure to multiply was the worst misfortune possible. From the entryway, one moved into a Tuscanic atrium, where the two wooden chests containing the family’s treasure were housed.

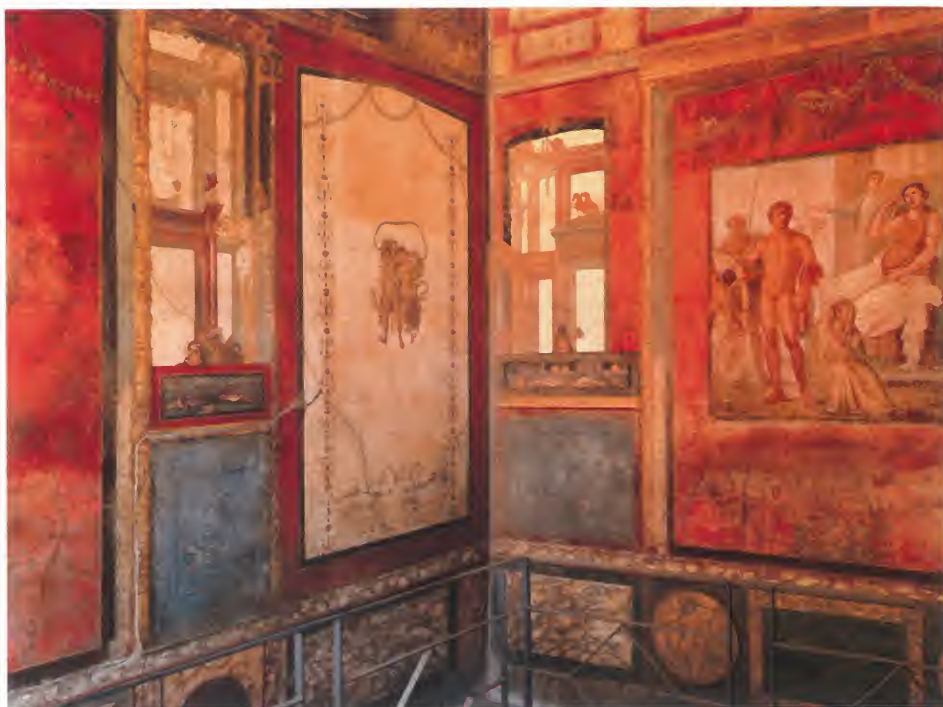
In this house, the *tablinum* was eliminated in order to make more space for the garden. Three large rooms opened onto the garden: the Room of Ixion (the *oecus*); the Room of Pentheus (the *exedra*); and the dining room (the *cenatium*). The architectural decoration in the Room of Ixion showed scenes of unhappy love affairs: that of Pasiphae for the bull, Ixion for Juno, and Ariadne for Theseus.

The first painting recounts the story of Pasiphae, wife of Minos and queen of Crete. According to the myth, Minos became king of Crete through the intervention of Poseidon. The god caused a magnificent bull to come forth from the waters, and, in return for helping Minos achieve the crown of Crete, he asked that the king sacrifice this bull to him. But when Minos saw this superb animal, he decided to switch it with one of his own herd, sacrificing the lesser beast. The vengeance of the god was terrible. He inspired in Pasiphae, Minos’s queen, an irresistible passion for the bull. She commissioned the sculptor Daedalus to make a cow of white wood, and she entered it in order to couple with the bull. Through this unnatural mating, she gave birth to the Minotaur, a monster with the body of a man and the head of a bull. The painting at the House of the Vettii represents the moment when Daedalus delivers his sculpture, mounted on wheels like a toy. The queen, portrayed as a majestic woman with a hairstyle that was fashionable during Nero’s reign, eagerly accepts his creation.

The central picture depicts Ixion who fell in love with Hera. Zeus, her husband, tricked Ixion into mating with a cloud that had formed in the shape of the goddess and then punished him for his bad intentions. Zeus then had him bound to a wheel that never stopped moving.

The last painting in the room shows the unhappy love affair between Ariadne and Theseus. Ariadne was forced to leave her homeland for having helped the Athenian Theseus escape from the labyrinth. Theseus promised matrimony and took her along on his journey back to Athens. But he abandoned the unfortunate Ariadne on the island of Naxos. The desperation of the heroine was the subject of one of Catullus’s most beautiful poems (64) and was also a popular melodrama subject up until the eighteenth century. This painting represents the happy ending to the story, when Dionysus saves the bereft Ariadne and becomes her lover.





The Room of Pentheus recounts the cycle of stories set in Thebes: *The Infant Hercules Strangling the Snake*, *The Death of Pentheus*, and *The Punishment of Dirce*. The picture representing Hercules shows the infant hero, born of the illegitimate union of Zeus and Alcmena, the wife of Amphitryon, strangling the snakes that Hera, in a jealous rage over her husband's infidelities, had sent to kill the child. The central painting depicts one of Euripides' most famous tragedies, the *Bacchantes*. Pentheus, king of Thebes, had banned the cult of Dionysus in his kingdom. One night he went out to the mountains dressed as a woman, in order to spy on the Bacchantes. In their frenzy, they mistook him for a lion, attacked him, and tore him apart. The story was all the more poignant because the leader of the women was Agave, the king's own mother. Thus the god took vengeance on the king who tried to suppress his cult.

The painting on the right wall represents the *Punishment of Dirce*. Dirce, the evil stepmother of Amphion and Zethus, was murdered by her two young stepsons when they learned how badly she had treated Antiope, the queen of Thebes and their real mother. Overcome with anger, the two youths dragged their stepmother from a bacchic procession and tied her to a raging bull, which violated her and then pulled her to pieces on the slopes of Mount Cithaeron.

The decoration in the dining room is the loveliest in the house and certainly one of the most beautiful at Pompeii. The walls were painted in the Fourth Style and have red panels separated from one another by decorated bands with black grounds. At the center of the panels are flying couples composed of maenads, heroes, and divinities—Apollo and Daphne, Dionysus and Ariadne, Neptune and Amymone, Perseus and Andromeda, and Mars and Venus. Extensive black-ground friezes run above the dados; they are decorated with little putti engaged in human occupations—making perfume, working gold, running, and selling wine. The small pictures, placed below the foreshortened views inserted between the panels, show scenes from Greek mythology. One shows Agamemnon with Artemis's hind. In this story, a prophecy had ordained that in order to ensure a Greek victory over Troy, Agamemnon must sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia. The girl was rescued by Artemis, who arranged that a hind be sacrificed in her place. Another picture represents Orestes and Pylades, who murder the former's mother, Clytemnestra, and her lover Aegisthus, to avenge their murder of his father, Agamemnon. After killing his mother, Orestes was driven mad by the Furies, the goddesses of vengeance, but was later found innocent by the Areopagus, the ancient



View of the Room of Pentheus.

Athenian judicial council, thanks to the intercession of Apollo and Athena. From that moment the Furies were transformed into the Eumenides, or the “kind ones.” The final picture depicts the tale of Apollo and Python.

A women’s apartment (*gynaeceum*) is situated on the north side of the house on one side of the garden. The kitchen runs along one side of the atrium, and nearby is a small private room with erotic paintings. It seems likely that the master of the house used this small room as a place to conduct trysts with his slaves.

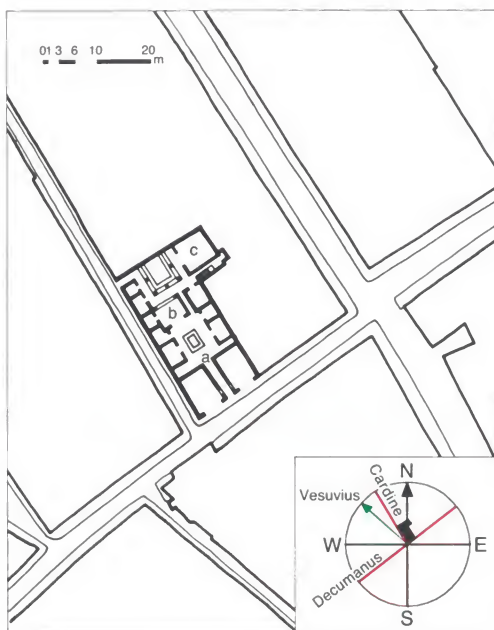
The most enchanting part of the house, the garden was planned like an open-air living room. The flowerbeds are modern restorations, carefully following the traces left by the ancient ones. Surrounded by a peristyle, the garden was divided into beds of flowering plants adorned with marble and bronze statues. Two double-headed herms have the faces, respectively, of a Silenus with a Bacchante and Dionysus with Ariadne. Two small tables and basins, a circular one in each corner and a rectangular one on each side, were set out for the family’s use. The water, piped in through lead tubes, was distributed by means of twelve statues, nine of which have been found. The maintenance of a garden like this depended on a continuous supply of water, possible at Pompeii and along the Campanian coast only after the aqueducts of Serino were constructed in the Augustan period. Previously residents in the city had depended on cisterns and wells, some of which were as much as thirty meters (98 ft.) deep. The mouths of the cisterns in this house were found closed, confirming that the aqueducts were the only source of water at the time of destruction.

The walls of the garden were decorated with a series of panels containing architectural scenes rendered in perspective, and these scenes measured the progress of the viewer as he moved along the ambulatory. The colonnade, however, must be dated earlier than the paintings since the elements of the fictive architecture and the real columns do not line up. At the center of each panel are still lifes and figures, among which we find, on the south wall, a figure identified as a poet, possibly Menander, with a case containing two papyrus scrolls. On the wall between the right wing of the colonnade and the Ixion *oecus* we see the muse Urania resting a staff on a globe.

The workshop responsible for the House of the Vettii was one of the most active in Pompeii in the middle of the first century A.D. We can also securely attribute to it the important decorative cycles at the Macellum, the Temple of Isis, the House of Siricus, and the so-called Murecine hotel.

The House of the Tragic Poet

POMPEII



The House of the Tragic Poet has a modest entrance on the Via delle Terme, almost exactly opposite the Forum baths complex. It was excavated in 1824–25, and in 1834 the English author Edward Bulwer Lytton used it as the residence of Glaukos, the protagonist of his famous novel *The Last Days of Pompeii*. Although it is relatively small, it represents the typical Pompeian house with an atrium and peristyle. The atrium is Tuscanic: that is, its ceiling is supported by beams rather than columns. It also provides access to the upper floor.

The *Cave Canem* (Beware of the Dog) mosaic, made famous in so many schoolbooks, lies at the threshold of this house. One would think that a simple sign should have sufficed as a warning, but perhaps not everyone in Pompeii could read.

The house's owner must have been a cultivated man. A lover of the theater and literature, he had numerous famous Greek masterpieces copied onto his walls. Almost all of the frescoes and mosaics from the house are now in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples. The atrium cycle depicts scenes from the *Iliad* in a series of square paintings—for example, *Achilles and Briseis*, *The Departure of Chryseis*, and *Zeus and Hera*. The mosaic representation of actors, from which the house derived its name, was located in the *tablinum*, as was a painting of *Admetus and Alcestis*. The famous picture of *The Sacrifice of Iphigenia* was discovered in the peristyle, and *Venus with a Nest of Cupids*, *Ariadne Abandoned on Naxos*, and *Diana* all decorated the *triclinium* that opened onto the portico.

The principal painting in the atrium and one of the most famous Pompeian pictures represents a veiled Briseis taking her leave of Achilles before she returns to Agamemnon. Patroclus stands between the two principal figures with his back to the viewer. Phoenix, king of the Dolopes, a companion of Peleus and counselor to Achilles, stands behind the latter figure wearing a thoughtful expression. To the left we can see Achilles' heralds, identified by the caduceus, and the army of the Myrmidons, and to the right, in the background, Achilles' tent. The sorrowful glance between the lovers—their final goodbye—reveals a conception of tragedy typical of late classicism (the second half of the fourth century B.C.), when the prototype for this Pompeian painting was produced.

Above: Plan of the House of the Tragic Poet

- a. Atrium (3)
- b. Tablinum (8)
- c. Triclinium (15)

Right: Reconstruction of the House of the Tragic Poet



The second painting and a pendant to the scene of Briseis and Achilles, is thought to represent Helen about to board Paris's ship for Troy. Some scholars have suggested, however, that this painting represents Chryseis, who was taken from her father, Chryses, and carried off to Agamemnon. The woman is just about to mount the gangplank, assisted by two small servants and followed by a warrior. The painting derives from a late classical prototype from about the middle of the fourth century A.D.

A mosaic in the *tablinum* represents actors as they prepare to go on stage. One of them is rehearsing his part, another is trying various musical instruments, and yet another is putting on his costume. This work is a Roman copy of a fourth- or third-century-B.C. painting that was a poet's votive offering after his success in the theater.

The famous picture representing several scenes from the story of Iphigenia in a single composition was once located in the peristyle. Iphigenia's father, Agamemnon, stands on the left side of the painting. His head is shrouded by a cloak and his hand covers his face in a gesture that betrays his agony for having ordered the sacrifice of his daughter. Next to him stands a statue of Artemis-Hecate, high on a pedestal holding a pair of torches and flanked by her hounds. At the center of the picture Odysseus and Diomedes carry off Iphigenia by force; she is partially nude and she spreads her arms out in a plea for help. Calchas, the seer who foretold the necessity of sacrificing Iphigenia to secure victory against the Trojans, is seen to the right in a perplexed and meditative stance. Iphigenia herself appears again in the sky where, having been rescued by a hind, she is received by Artemis. First believed to be a faithful copy of a famous work by Timantes and described by Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* 35.64.74 ff.), scholars now think this painting is a reworking of several prototypes.

The house's *triclinium* has a black socle with panels decorated with carpet edging, garlands, candelabra, and flying birds. Between the panels are smaller, vertical compartments with *aediculae* and griffins. The middle zone has a dark red frieze at the bottom; its central scene shows a hunt of the Centaurs, with dolphins and seahorses on either side. The middle part of the wall is divided into three areas. The center has a hanging yellow carpet with the famous scene of the *Nest of Cupids*, possibly a copy of a fourth-century-B.C. painting. Two lovers (perhaps Adonis and Aphrodite) contemplate the tiny cupids, which sit like baby birds in the nest that the female figure holds.

At the center of the east wall, opposite the entrance, is the painting of Theseus abandoning Ariadne. Theseus is shown embarking on his ship against a broad landscape with a castle on a forested mountain; he casts a melancholy glance at Ariadne as she lies on the ground. This picture, and another version of the same at the Villa Imperiale, may be the only surviving traces of a famous Greek painting from the end of the fifth century B.C. The south wall has a mythical picture of Diana: in this scene, she discovers that Callisto, one of her followers, is pregnant by Zeus, who came to her in the form of Diana herself.

The decorations of the *triclinium*, with mythological scenes hung from vividly colored curtains, recall the sumptuous curtain of the Alexandrian king, Ptolemy Philadelphus, which is known to us only through the written descriptions of ancient authors.



The famous "Beware of Dog" mosaic that decorates the entrance to the house.

Page 181: The House of the Tragic Poet. Detail of the face of Hera from the atrium (Naples, National Archaeological Museum).

Page 182: The House of the Vettii. Detail of the painted decoration in the *triclinium* with putti tasting wine.

Page 183: The House of the Vettii. Detail of the painted decoration in the *triclinium* with cult scenes and a candelabrum.

Pages 184–85: The House of the Vettii. *The Punishment of Dirce*, part of the painted decoration in the Room of Pentheus.

Page 186: The House of the Tragic Poet. Detail from the *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* from the painted decoration of the peristyle (Naples, National Archaeological Museum).

Page 187: The House of the Tragic Poet. Detail from the *Sacrifice of Iphigenia* from the painted decoration of the peristyle (Naples, National Archaeological Museum).

Pages 188–89: The House of the Tragic Poet. *Admetus and Alcestis* from the painted decoration of the *tablinum* (Naples, National Archaeological Museum).















The Palaestra

HERCULANEUM

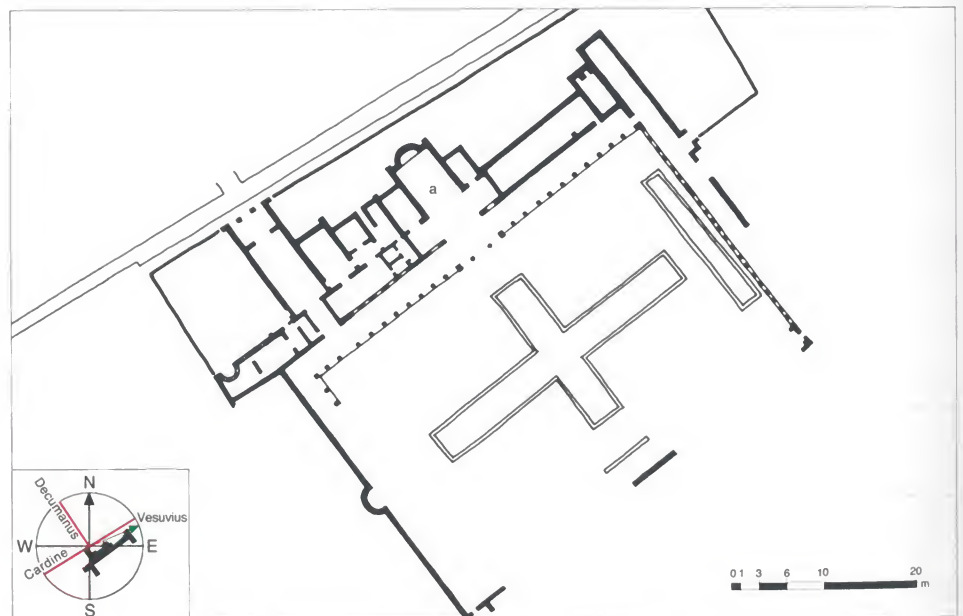
Plan of the Palaestra at Herculaneum

a. Hall or apsidal room with painted stage set

Facing page: View of the Palaestra at Herculaneum.

The construction of the Palaestra or gymnasium was part of an expansion of the city to the south, after the terrain had been suitably leveled. The entrance to the Palaestra was a monumental, prostyle vestibule on the fifth *cardine*; inside this entrance are fragments of a collapsed vault with decorations that represented a star-studded sky. The open space was surrounded on three sides by a Corinthian portico and on the north side by a cryptoporticus. An enormous apsidal hall—9.8 meters (32 ft.) high with a marble floor and socle—was situated at the center of the west portico. Colossal statues of members of the Julio-Claudian family stood on the podium, and a heavy table of Luni marble was placed at the center of the room; it was used to award prizes to the young victors. The open space was originally planted with trees, and it had a cruciform pool (35 m or 114 ft. on its long axis). At its center was a bronze fountain in the shape of a monstrous five-headed serpent coiled around a tree trunk. Each of the monster's heads spit water into the basin. This serpent represented the Hydra, the beast that Hercules, the mythical founder of the city, defeated as one of his twelve labors (*dodecathlon*).

The deep basin that ran parallel to the cryptoporticus was a fishpond, and the holes in the walls contained amphora to collect the eggs. The pond was found to be full of debris that predated A.D. 79, an indication that it had been filled in before the eruption of Mount Vesuvius. Built in the Julio-Claudian period, the Palaestra was the home of one the city's most important institutions, the *iuventus*, part of the emperor's effort to sponsor sporting and paramilitary associations for youth (the *collegia iuvenum*). Palaestras played an important role in imperial propaganda in various localities, helping to convey state ideology to impressionable adolescents.





A fresco panel in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples, detached from the Palaestra in 1743, represents the only real evidence of the sumptuous decoration of the apsidal room, although a few faded fragments linger on the original walls. The Naples panel shows a raised curtain of rich drapery, inspired by the sumptuous theater sets of the late Hellenistic period. In the foreground is a fictive door with a richly decorated central *aedicula*. The columns in this painting are covered with metal volutes, and the acroteria are metal statues of Tritons, Pegasus, and a theater mask. The upper level is set farther back, and it shows another building, this one with a broken tympanum, and farther back a colonnade with a Delphic tripod. This Fourth Style architectural decoration gives us an idea of the decorative excess of the Domus Aurea, as we understand it from the descriptions of the ancient authors. It also demonstrates how Nero's megalomania, expressed by means of his architects and decorators, quickly translated into the Fourth Pompeian Style, a fashion adopted by the Roman middle class throughout the empire.

The House of the Skeleton

HERCULANEUM

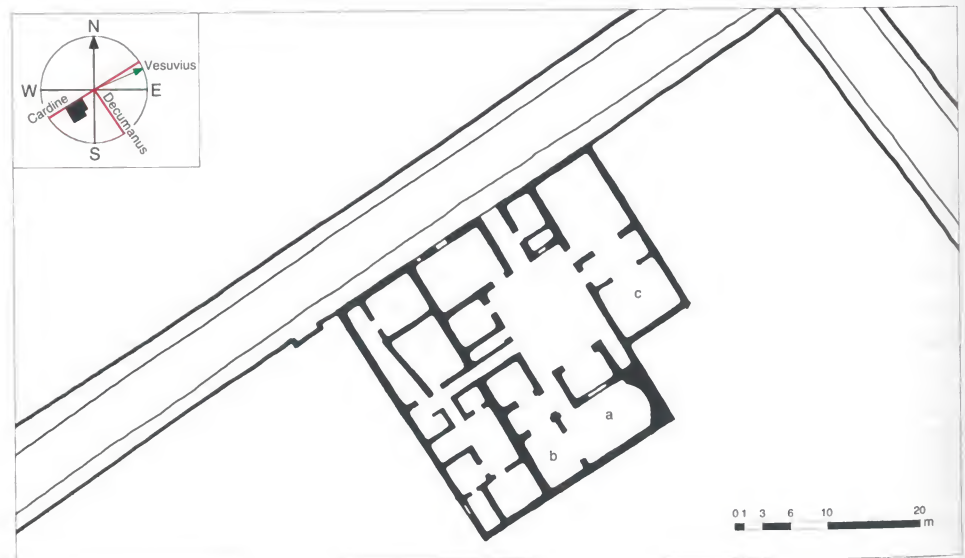
Plan of the House of the Skeleton

- a. Dining *oecus* with an apse (7)
- b. Nymphaeum (8)
- c. Summer *triclinium* with a nymphaeum (5)

Facing page: Summer *triclinium* or dining room (5).

The House of the Skeleton opens onto the third *cardine*. The front part of the house was excavated in 1830–31, during the course of which a skeleton was discovered on its first floor. The better-preserved upper part was excavated much later, in 1927–28, by Amadeo Maiuri. The residence represents the conjoining of three long buildings. The atrium had no *impluvium* and was completely covered (*atrium testudinatum*), its roof sloping toward the sidewalls rather than the center. This kind of atrium was rare at Pompeii but less so at Herculaneum. Because this small house had no garden peristyle, airshafts were built at the back of each of the three wings to ventilate the building.

The left wing contained a *triclinium* that opened onto a gracious nymphaeum; it was furnished with two tubs and rear walls that simulated a grotto, with limestone blocks laid in *opus quadratum* and painted red. The blue-ground mosaic above, made with glass *tesserae*, is divided into panels framed with shells, representing rural themes: a shepherd dressed in an *exomis* (a brief garment tied at one shoulder) leading an unwilling ram to be sacrificed; a cornucopia; and an offering bearer carrying a fawn. (These illusionistic devices would be revived in European Baroque and Rococo architectural decoration.) The courtyard at the back of the central wing also has a nymphaeum, with a deep pool. The *sacellum* that seems to emerge from the pool is covered with mosaic, and the paintings on the walls of the courtyard create the illusion of a garden to make up for the lack of a real one (even the marble disks—*oscilla*—are typical decorative elements in real gardens). The courtyard is protected overhead by a grate in order to prevent thieves from entering the house from the adjacent roofs.





Detail of the nymphaeum (8).

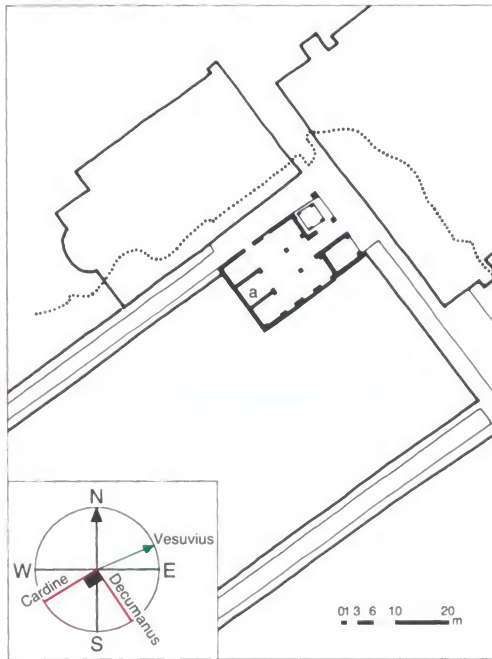
Facing page: View of the dining *oecus* with an apse (7).





The Collegium of the Augustales

HERCULANEUM



Plan of the Collegium of the Augustales

a. Cella or sanctuary with Fourth Style painted decoration

Facing page: View of the ground floor with the sanctuary, decorated in the Fourth Style, at the center.

The Collegium of the Augustales is one of the most evocative buildings in Herculaneum. Its entrance stands on a corner with doors on both the third *cardine* and the Decumanus Maximus.

The *Augustales* were adherents of the imperial cult, brought together in a sacred college. They were mostly freedmen who could never rise to the magistracy; membership in the cult provided them with a means of social mobility, since the *Augustalis* entitled its members to seats in the stadium between the plebians and the *ordo decurionum*. Enrollment in the college thus brought something like a noble title to humble folk. At Herculaneum, the college preserved a marble register bearing the names of its members for the last decade of its existence.

The building, dating to the late Augustan period, presented the appearance of a two-storied cube. The ground floor is occupied by a wide hypostyle hall (13.5 × 15.7 m or 44 × 51.5 ft.) with four columns at its center, which was used for public meetings. The upper floor was a *matroneum* (matrons' room) accessible by an external staircase. Four broad windows allowed those on the upper floor to participate in what was happening below.

The marble inscription on the north wall suggests how the building functioned: "Sacred to Augustus. Aulus Lucius Proculus and Aulus Lucius Julius, the sons of Aulus and from the tribe of the Menenia, will offer at their own expense a banquet for the *Decurioni* and *Augustales* on the occasion of the consecration." It is likely that the strophe was part of the hymn sung during the dinner offered at the inauguration of the building. The cella, sumptuously decorated with a marble floor and socle as well as Fourth Style decoration (perhaps from the time of Nero), has two paintings that recall the feats of Hercules, the mythical founder of the city. The one on the left represents Hercules, Juno, and Minerva and the one on the right Hercules, Acheloos, and Deianeira. A bust of the emperor was placed on a masonry base against the back wall.

The painting of *Hercules and Acheloos* shows the hero fighting the river god Acheloos, who had tried to rape Hercules' wife Deianeira. The god had transformed himself into a bull and in the ensuing struggle Hercules broke off one of its horns, from which sprang abundance. Hercules battling Acheloos thus served to remind the city that the cornucopia, a device typically used in imperial propaganda to suggest prosperity, could be traced back to the actions of its mythical and divine founder.

The other painting, *The Apotheosis of Hercules*, shows the goddesses Hera and Athena accompanying the hero to Olympus. Hera's presence is unusual since in the Greek tradition it is Hermes and Athena who accompany the hero. The whale in the background symbolizes Jupiter. Here in an exceptional Roman translation of the myth, the hero is presented to the Capitoline triad—Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva—upon his apotheosis. In this context, the scene seems to communicate that even human beings can achieve perfection if they follow the *virtutis*.

The figurative program seems to have been conceived on two levels. The first revolves around the cult of the emperor (with his bust and statue), and the second the cult of the city's founder, Hercules, who became immortal (apotheosis) because he was a benefactor of human-kind (cornucopia). Thus Hercules, the human hero who gained immortality once he accomplished the challenges or labors set before him, becomes a symbol of the divine monarchy of the Roman Empire. European monarchies, including the Bourbon dynasty in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, also used the Greco-Roman myths allegorically to advance their own ends.

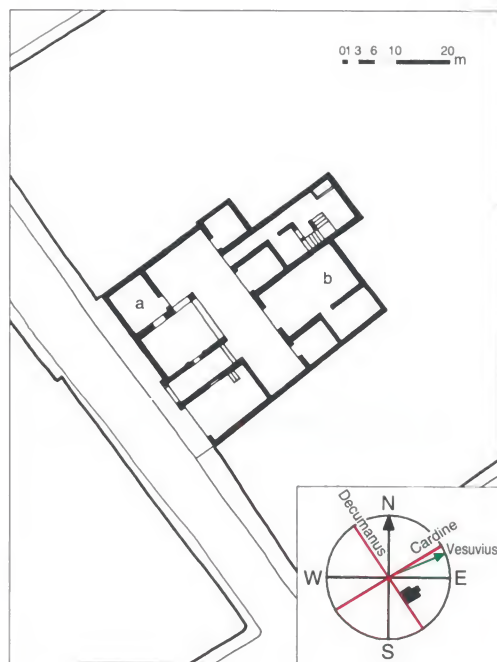


View of the sanctuary. The lateral walls have two paintings of the deeds of Hercules: the figures of Hercules, Juno, and Minerva are represented on the left; and on the right, Hercules, Acheloos, and Deianeira. A bust of the emperor Augustus stood on the masonry base against the rear wall.



The House of the Grand Portal

HERCULANEUM



Plan of the House of the Grand Portal

a. *Diaeta* (6)

b. *Triclinium* (1)

Facing page: The large doorway that gives the house its name.

It is the lovely portal that gives this house its name. It is the only residence that faces the city's lower *decumanus*. The lintel over the brick doorway is supported by columns whose capitals are carved with winged Victories. Originally the columns were stuccoed and painted red, while their figural capitals seem to have been sculpted from gray tufa and then stuccoed with white plaster. The decoration with the winged Victories dates to the second half of the first century B.C. This portal is unique in Herculaneum and resembles only a few examples in Pompeii, all of which postdate the earthquake of A.D. 62 and belong to the early Flavian period. These examples are the prototypes for the lovely second-century portals of the houses of Ostia and imperial Rome.

The House of the Grand Portal was built in the Imperial era. Its plan is unique because it was essentially carved out of a peristyle that belonged originally to the Samnite House. Indeed one can still see the tufa columns of that peristyle walled up inside the new entrance hall. The architect's greatest challenge in designing the new house was illumination, and he also had to resolve the problem of distributing rooms around a small courtyard that was at a higher elevation than the entrance to the building. The result, even though it strayed from more traditional plans, was a comfortable and aristocratic residence.

The long entry hall was built at a distinct slant in order to overcome the difference in elevation between the sidewalk and the house, which is at the same level as the Samnite House. The courtyard opens to the left of the entrance, and it assumed the function of the atrium: it ventilated the house and collected rain water, channeling it toward the cistern. The garden painted on its walls stood in for a real one. The service area of the house—the storeroom, kitchen, and latrine—lies at the rear.

The Fourth Style decoration of the *diaeta* is especially refined. This small living room, located next to the courtyard, is painted with a fresco of birds set against a blue ground, intent on pecking at cherries and butterflies. The red socle is decorated with candelabra surmounted by eagles and by small balconies with garden statues holding marble basins. The painting in the middle register is also set against a blue ground; it shows architectural structures connected by slender garlands and animated by tritons, centaurs, chimairae, and griffins. Two bands of white run across the decorative fields. The first is the frieze on the lower part of the northeast wall, which has volutes of vegetal motifs and is dotted with sea or river masks. The frieze on the upper part of the northwest wall has a curtain hung from the entablature that is decorated with griffins and vegetal creatures, interrupted by emblems, military trophies, piers, and small pavilions with coffered ceilings.

The wall paintings in the exedra, a small and elegant space that opens onto the bright courtyard, are almost entirely preserved. The socle is red and the painted walls above have a yellow ground (the red veining comes from changes in the pigment). At the center of each of the three walls is an *aedicula* surmounted by a tympanum whose ceiling is wreathed with slender flowering garlands. The acroteria terminate in centaur figures and the sides are supported by slender *hermae*. The curtain seems to be the preferred motif in this house, and it recurs in the frieze here. Where the curtain is raised, one can peer into a garden with birds and cupids among the flowers. The painting is executed in an almost impressionistic manner, with lively decorative and color effects. The best-preserved passage is in the central panel of the right wall, where two cupids pick



Facing page: Fourth Style decoration in the *diaeta*.

Page 204: The Palaestra at Herculaneum. Panel with Fourth Style painted decoration from the apsidal room (Naples, National Archaeological Museum). A raised curtain of fine material reveals a late Hellenistic theater set, and in the foreground stands a doorway with a central *aedicula*.

Page 205: The House of the Grand Portal. Painting from the rear wall of the *triclinium*; it represents Silenus and two satyrs who watch the encounter between Dionysus and Ariadne.

Page 206: The Collegium of the Augustales. Left wall of the sanctuary with the *Apotheosis of Hercules*. Hercules journeys to Mount Olympus, accompanied by the goddesses Hera and Athena.

Page 207: The Collegium of the Augustales. Right wall of the sanctuary with *Hercules and Acheloos*. The fresco represents Hercules struggling with the river god Acheloos, who had tried to assault the hero's wife Deianeira.

large roses and put them in an overflowing basket at their feet. One of the cupids ports a large pannier on his arm.

The *triclinium* must have been the principal space in the house since it is situated on axis with the entrance and was thus visible from the exterior. This explains the high quality of its decoration, the monumentality of the central *aedicula*, and the singular character of the scene represented in the painting. The wall has a central *aedicula* with sumptuous scrolls on its pediment, and it is flanked by two red lateral panels. The frieze above the panel shows scenes of the hunt. The upper register has exedras topped with eagles against a white ground.

The painting on the rear wall is a splendid representation of a Dionysian subject. An old Silenus and two satyrs watch the meeting between Dionysus and Ariadne. The episode unfolds across a rural landscape. On the left is a statue of Priapus on a small column; he holds an inverted torch in one hand and the hoof of a goat or the trunk of a shrub in the other. Dionysus appears to be leaning on his thyrsus and behind him we see the elegant figure of Ariadne wrapped in a cloak. To the center right of the picture, two curious and malicious satyrs spy on the divine couple from the shelter of an altar. A Silenus on the right admonishes them to be silent by bringing his hand up to his mouth. Some scholars have suggested that since no clear precedents for this subject have been found, the painting must be unique and may be the work of a Neo-Attic painter.





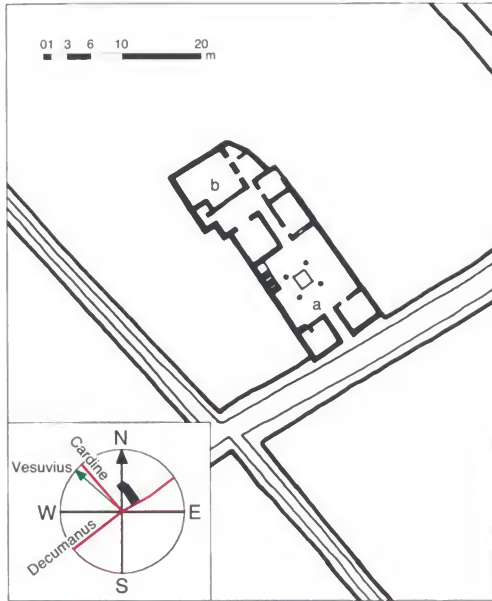






The House of the Ceii

POMPEII



Above: Plan of the House of the Ceii

- a. Atrium (b)
- b. Viridarium (h)

Right: Three-dimensional rendering of the fresco in the *viridarium* representing a wild animal hunt. It is placed at the end of a sequence of spaces that stretches through the entire house (drawing by Ludovica Bucci de Santis and Simonetta Capecchi).

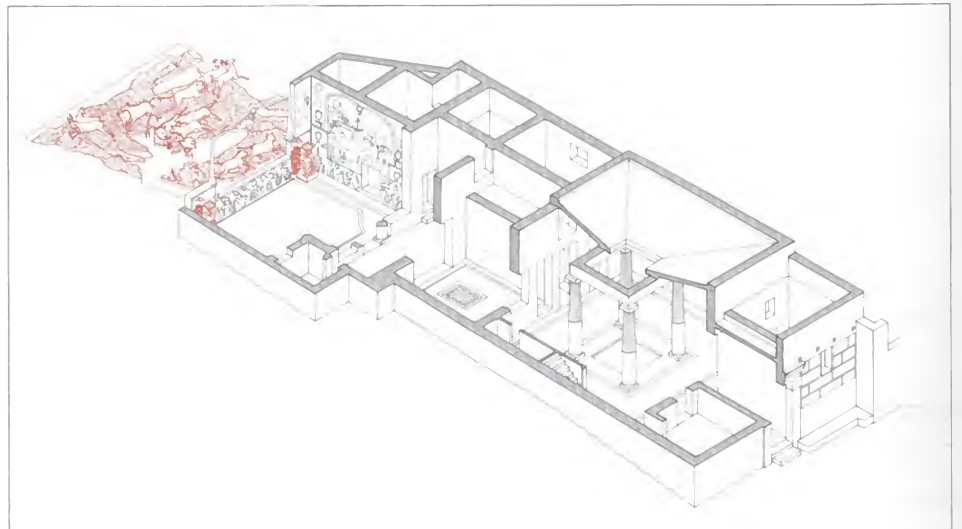
The small House of the Ceii is located to the south of the Via di Abbondanza, almost in front of the House of Menander. If one wanted to “live” the experience of a little Egypt, one only needed an invitation from the owner of this house.

The name of the house’s owner, Lucius Ceius Secundus, was chosen from among the many election slogans painted on its facade. This facade preserves both the original plaster imitation of *opus quadratum* and the dentil cornice over the portal, which is supported by cubic capitals typical of Samnite architecture. The whole is protected by an overhanging roof, which was restored using the original materials found in the course of excavation.

In the entryway we can admire the plaster cast of a single door knocker and the remains of the lock as well as the decoration of the ceiling, which was entirely reconstructed using the many fragments discovered there. The entry leads to a tetrastyle atrium with an *impluvium* at the center that is composed of large earthenware crocks. The walls are decorated in the Third Style with red and black grounds in the middle register and a white ground in the upper register.

The decoration in the *cubiculum* to the right of the entrance plays on the vivid contrasts among the colors (blue, red, yellow, black, and white). The friezes have a black ground and are positioned over the red panels of the middle register; they are decorated with small birds that approach to peck at the fruit. The room to the left of the entry was a kitchen with the cooking surface at the back wall, next to the latrine.

The *tablinum* and *triclinium* opened off the other side of the atrium, to the right and left, respectively, of the corridor that led to the garden. The decoration in the *tablinum* was being restored following the addition of an upper story, which would have entailed lowering the ceiling of this room. The pavement was made from lava stone in mortar (*lavapesta*); it had a pretty



geometric motif in white mosaic tiles and a central panel (*emblema*) of tiles arranged in black and white lozenges. The walls in the dining room were given a black ground, and the left wall had a painting of *Dionysus with a Panther*, an animal sacred to that god.

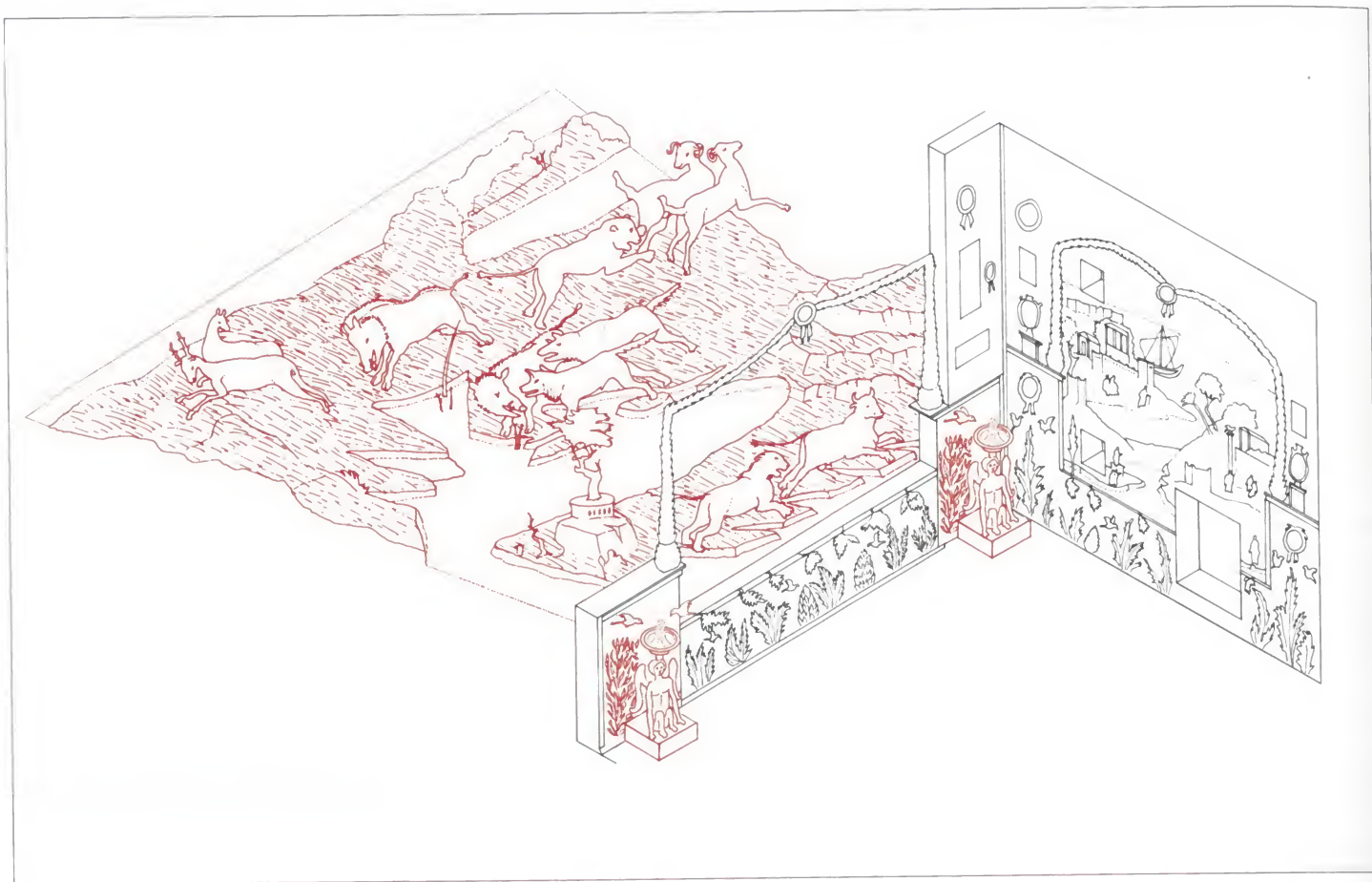
The garden was decorated with landscape elements typical of Fourth Style. The north wall of the *viridarium* represents a *paradeisos* (garden paradise) with animals; the west wall a landscape view of the banks of the Nile, complete with pygmies; and the east wall another, this time idyllic, view of the Nile Valley. Evidently the three walls together represented Egypt—to the left Upper Egypt with its pygmies, at the center Middle Egypt with its wild beasts, and to the right the Lower Egypt of the Ptolemies with landscapes of sanctuaries along the course of the river.

The rear or north wall presents a large fictive window, framed with a red band, through which we view a hunt scene. This painting recalls the *paradeisos* with its wild animals. In this central zone, we see a lion in the foreground pursuing a bull; at mid-level, a wild boar being attacked by two dogs, a second wild boar chasing two hinds, and two rams fleeing before a leopard. Rocks in the left corner run down to a broken cliff in the foreground, and in the mid-distance we see a circular structure built around a large tree trunk like a masonry ring. The base of the wall is decorated with carefully spaced plants. On either side of the window, a sphinx holds up a basin before a backdrop of shrubs, and the scene itself is set against a yellow ground. The window frame—its vertical uprights and the horizontal element above—is decorated with painted reliefs, shields, helmets with ribbons, and tritons. The small reliefs in the frame are of two types: in the first, fantastical figures with a vegetal lower half (*Rankengott*) and pairs of griffins appear on a black ground; in the second, on a yellow ground, a priest with a votive plate (*lanx*) and, above, griffins with legs transformed into vines. At the center of the wall, several holes show where the painters attached their scaffolding. These marks conform to the seams between the *giornate* of the fresco, that is, the patches of the painting that the artist was able to complete over the course of one day.

On the west wall, to the left of the hunt scene, a fictive window opens onto a scene on the banks of the Nile, with the characteristic Egyptian elements of pygmies, hippopotami, and crocodiles. Here, a group of pygmies on a small island chase after a hippopotamus: one of them has climbed onto the animal's back while the others, holding lances and shields, encourage their comrade from the shores of the island. A crocodile lounges in the background, and in the upper right of the picture we can see pygmies transporting amphorae on a boat with a prow shaped like an ass's head. At the center of the island, we can make out a sanctuary, although the fragmentary condition of the fresco makes it impossible to determine to whom it might be dedicated. Inside this sanctuary we see traces of an altar, as well as a building with a gate and a medallion hanging like an *ex-voto*. In the central foreground, pygmy travelers with walking sticks and satchels migrate forward. The illusion of space is enhanced by means of color, which fades in intensity from the foreground to the background. Two *omphaloi* of ivy with white birds flying around them stand just below the fictive window.

East wall of the *viridarium* with the idyllic landscape of the banks of the Nile.





Only the lower part of the decoration on the east or right wall is still discernable. There we see sacred buildings along the banks of the Nile and sanctuaries in the background. The cornice of the window is essentially like the previous one. The red socle rises about halfway up the wall, and on it is painted a garden in which we see small birds and plants. The upper part of the wall is framed with a yellow cornice, which is decorated above with metal vases (*hydriae*), flower buds, and shields. The window at the center of the wall reveals the largest landscape in any Pompeian painting.

The Nile, identified by the boat with a wind-filled sail (a *feluca*), seems almost to flow into the *viridarium* of the house. The river itself bends and twists, revealing its banks, islets, and rocky points. There are three sacred buildings among a palm grove in the upper left of the painting; they include a tetrastyle pavilion with vaults, a small sanctuary with a pointed door and acroteria above, and a small, rectangular tower. Two female figures are seated in front of the sanctuary, and an old woman walks along the riverbank leaning on her stick. On the left, beside a tree, is a typical Egyptian altar with four horns. Farther down is a wooden statue of Priapus, and two travelers moving along the banks.

A rocky mountain peak with two trees takes up the center of the picture. Along the riverbank below, to the left of a large opening in the wall, are several ex-votos including a gigantic bunch of grapes and a picture (*pinax*). In the upper left, another sanctuary with a small, tetrastyle



temple is encircled by woods and a crenellated wall. A tall column with a sphinx stands in front of the temple. Farther down and to the left, another sphinx sits in profile, this time on a high pedestal. A woman seated with her servant and a mother and child are placed in front of the sanctuary precinct. Lower down still, and to the right of the real opening in the wall, is a traveler dressed in a hood or *cucullus*, carrying a stick and a chest for his possessions. Finally, we see a goat, turning its face away from us.

This composition recalls, in several of its elements, the famous *Barberini Mosaic* in Palestrina. The latter, however, is almost a cartographic representation of the course of the Nile from Ethiopia to the delta; in the Pompeian painting, by contrast, we have the impression that the three windows use landscape to rather loosely illustrate the three regions through which the river flows—Upper, Middle, and Lower Egypt. The first is characterized by pygmies, the second by wild animals, and the third by architecture that suggests the nearby presence of great cities.

Facing page: Three-dimensional rendering of the space in the fresco in the *viridarium* with respect to the real space. The painting represents a hunting scene with wild animals (drawing by Ludovica Bucci de Santis and Simonetta Capecci).

North wall of the *viridarium* with its scene of a hunt for wild animals.

The House of Marcus Fabius Rufus

POMPEII, THE WESTERN INSULA

Facing page: The Second Style painted decoration has been partially covered by a later wall, which takes up the same decorative scheme. The upper register has an architectural view with a temple from which the goddess Aphrodite emerges carrying a cupid on her shoulder.

The neighborhood on the west slope of Pompeii contains some of the most sumptuous houses in the city, all of which enjoyed a panoramic view of the Bay of Naples. Built for the most part on sloping sites, the houses generally have several floors connected by narrow stairs. One of the loveliest of these is the House of Marcus Fabius Rufus.

In one room of the house—a room with walls and ceiling painted black—the decoration is particularly fine. The black ground creates a sense of penumbra, allowing the lustrous colors of the paintings and ornament to stand out.

The wall's middle zone is divided into three panels by two foreshortened structures. The central panel contains mythological paintings, including the *Seated Hercules with a Young Woman*, *Narcissus*, and *Satyr and the Infant Dionysus*. The lateral panels have vignettes of cupids playing with the attributes of the gods.

The upper register is defined at its base by a stuccoed cornice decorated with a reed motif, and it is painted with the traditional repertory of architectural elements populated with small figures, carpet borders, garlands, and so forth. The stucco frieze is especially remarkable for the white-painted animals against a blue ground. A black frieze with garlands and candelabra runs between the upper cornice and the vault.

A small, dropped vault articulates the ceiling. Its concentric decorative scheme comprises an octagon inscribed inside a square and lateral bands decorated with *aediculae*. The flat bands are decorated with square and rectangular paintings. Garlands, carpet borders, medallions, and small flying figures make up its rich ornamental repertoire.

This black-painted room, decorated like an architectural stage set, was rebuilt shortly after it was first finished. The owners added a new wall in front of the east wall, and it, too, was painted as an architectural stage set in the Second Style. In its final phase, the room was completely whitewashed. The pictorial decoration, visible on the upper part of the walls, reveals a view of a sanctuary, and the goddess Venus emerges from its central door, accompanied by a figure of Eros. Only the lower part of the second stage-set is preserved; it shows a podium that opens onto a stairway flanked by two wings of three columns, with a censer in the center.

The passageway from the peristyle to an interior room, possibly intended for cult use and summarily decorated in a Second Style schema, has a lunette decorated with a medallion. In this medallion, a divinity graces a tympanum delineated by two garlands hung against the red ground. At the center the goddess Aphrodite is painted wearing a sumptuous embroidered tunic that is fastened at the shoulders with brooches. She is adorned with three pearl necklaces, and earrings of twin pearls of a type frequently seen at Pompeii and Herculaneum. Her hair is elaborately dressed in ringlets, and she wears a golden diadem on her head; two pairs of veils hang down her back from the nape of her neck. The goddess holds a scepter decorated with a bird in her right hand. The rest of the painting is very simple—a red socle with horizontal lines, and a black middle register with squared panels edged with carpet borders and decorated with vignettes representing swans.



Painted decoration in the room between the peristyle and an interior space. There is a medallion with an image of Aphrodite at the center of the lunette and within a tympanum formed of garlands.

Facing page: Room with walls and ceilings that are painted with a black ground. Each wall is divided into three panels with architectural foreshortenings. The middle section has paintings of mythological subjects, while the pictures in the lateral panels represent putti who play with the attributes of the gods and goddesses.

Pages 218–19: The House of Marcus Fabius Rufus. Detail of the rear wall of the room painted with Fourth Style decoration against a black ground. An image of a *Seated Hercules with a Young Woman* appears on the right.

Page 220: The House of Marcus Fabius Rufus. Detail of the Second Style painted decoration partially covered by a later wall. Venus emerges from the central doorway of a sanctuary accompanied by a figure of Eros.

Page 221: The House of Marcus Fabius Rufus. Medallion with an image of Venus. The richly dressed and bejeweled goddess holds a scepter.











On the Reconstruction of the Spatial Representations in Certain Roman Wall Paintings

LUDOVICA BUCCI DE SANTIS

Many of the paintings that decorated the walls of Roman houses depicted architectural spaces. The intent of this essay is to identify a logical process by which we can move from the painted images to physical spaces that are readable as continuous with the painted decorations.

To make a visual representation is to interpret what it represents. Furthermore, an image of any object, whether real or virtual, contains only some of its actual characteristics. Indeed, the criteria used in selecting the information to be conveyed are more important than the sheer quantity of information, in determining the expressive qualities or immediacy of the final picture. The reading of an image then becomes a doubly suggestive act of interpretation because it combines what the painter saw with the interpretations of the viewer.

The first level of interpretation is immediate and intuitive; it is based on impressions and feelings. Then, an analysis of the modes and techniques used in creating the representation strengthens this first, intuitive reading, creating a logical system in which images and their connotations help to clarify the spirit that generated them.

We have selected three architectural spaces for analysis: the Corinthian *oecus* in the House of the Labyrinth at Pompeii with its three frescoed walls; *Oecus* 15 at the Villa of Poppea at Oplontis; and the *viridarium* in the House of the Ceii at Pompeii. From a geometric point of view, these frescoes were constructed using what would be called linear or one-point perspective from the Renaissance period onward.

One-point perspective transforms a flat picture plane into a window that opens onto three-dimensional space. The objects represented in this space become increasingly small the farther they are meant to be from the viewer. Whether it is created intuitively or according to fixed rules, perspective has a certain interpretative value because it is a system of representation that mimics the way people see. To create perspective in a painting, one begins with the plan and elevation of the object to be represented, and the result is an image that changes as the spatial position of the artist changes. Although the effects can vary, perspective essentially brings forth a realistic, nonabstract image that is easily recognizable to a nonexpert viewer, who is easily swayed both conceptually and technically by the reciprocal position of three elements—the artist, the object being represented, and the representational plane.

Precisely because of the sense of realism it creates, perspective can generate very evocative representations. Nevertheless, it is also a representational tool codified by descriptive geometry. Thus it is worth seeing whether we might be able to trace a perspective image back, geometrically, to a precise physical space.

Normally one would do this using a photogrammetric reconstruction, a technique often used in architectural drawing to obtain measurements from photographs. The idea is that constructing an object in perspective is equivalent to projecting that object from a single point of view onto a flat surface, according to mathematical rules. Thus the perspective image, whether it is a drawing or a photograph, contains information that allows us to reconstruct its plan and elevations by determining its measurements, even though these may not be immediately obvious. In order to effect our reconstruction, we obviously need to construct a perspective image in such a way that we can identify this important information: that is, to determine the reference points in the geometric construction, including the distance of the point of view in the picture, its height, and at least one real measurement of an object being represented.¹

Description of the Process

This attempt at reconstructing or reconstituting the perspective of the images painted on the walls of Roman houses demanded a *sui generis* operation. In order to make it work, we had to make certain conceptual leaps with respect to the widely accepted procedures.

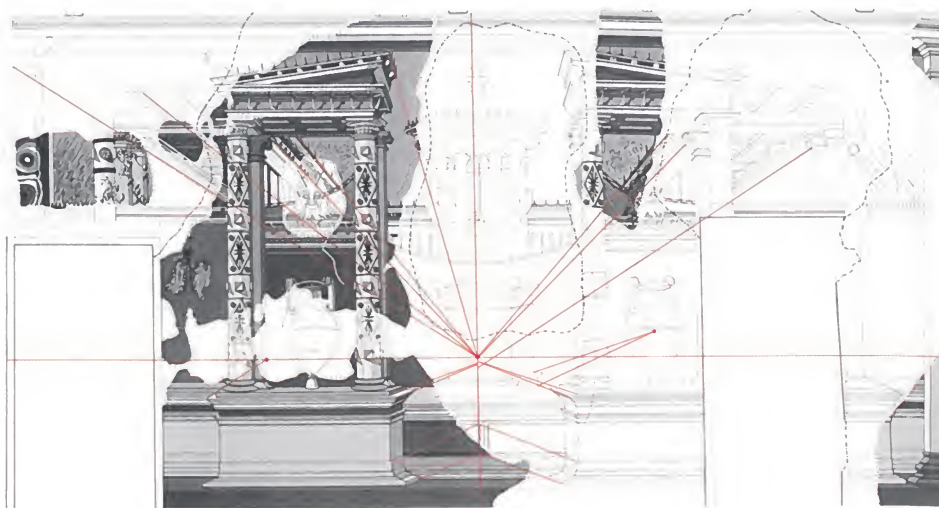
First of all, the space represented in Roman wall painting is not a physically real space, and thus the image may include fictions that yield physically impossible dimensions within the composition. In other words, an image, however fascinating, can represent an unbuildable building. We often find, for example, porticoes that have neither a beginning nor an end and walls parallel to the picture plane that never intersect with any others to square off the space; they are simply screens that suggest a space beyond but without revealing it. The architectural elements do not always reflect the canonical proportions of Roman buildings laid down in classical architectural treatises, nor is there necessarily a single, fixed typology of buildings in the surviving fresco fragments. And where one might try to exploit similarities to recurring elements in real works of Roman architecture in making a reconstruction, it is often difficult to find reasonable models to follow.

The process of restoring or reconstructing space, because it works by reducing real objects to points and lines, begins with outline drawings. The nuances of color in many pieces of wall paintings, as well as the inexorable impact of time on the colors themselves, often make it very difficult to find the drawing that lies beneath the fresco we see.² Our reconstructions of the paintings thus become even more interpretive, and in some ways they resemble the reconstructions of Roman architecture made by the nineteenth-century winners of the Grand Prix de Rome: In the process of reconstructing these edifices, based on precise drawings of the surviving elements, these *pensionnaires* of the Villa Medici (the French Academy in Rome) enriched the reality of the bare ruins they saw.³ And like them—or at least the best of them—we have not invented but rather restored the “idea” of the space originally created in an ancient workshop of painters. We thus cannot claim to offer an objectively restored image but rather to give a suggestion of what it was; it is based on concrete evidence, but then, through extrapolation and analogy, it becomes an exploration of the relationship between the real physical spaces and the real painted spaces.

It would be useful here to clarify a few points about the use of perspective in Roman painting. The perspective system described above is what we today call linear perspective, a representation technique codified in the fifteenth century. It has been noted that the Romans were also capable of technically correct perspective, although its theoretical bases are less clear.⁴ In the only architectural treatise that survives from antiquity, Vitruvius refers to stage sets and basically describes a type of representation in which perspective is “sketching a front with sides withdrawing into the background, the lines all meeting in the centre of a circle.”⁵ Many scholars have tried to make these sentences into a description of one-point perspective in the Renaissance sense. Other experts have pointed out that these spatial constructions are conceptually different because they express a vision of the world peculiar to Roman society and far removed from that of the Renaissance culture, which so fully expressed itself with one-point perspective.

All three of the frescoes analyzed here demonstrate, in different ways, the use of perspective, although it is not entirely similar to what we think of as the canonical perspective of the Renaissance. The process by which these works were created also plays a significant role in understanding each of the paintings. In fresco painting, the image is made before the plaster itself dries. Considering the dimensions of the walls, it is clear that these paintings cannot have been executed by a single artist; several artisans must have worked on them simultaneously. Given the diverse tasks involved in decorating a wall, the work must have been carried out by artisans who not only had different skills but also were of different origins. One might also hypothesize that the most visible and important parts of the frescoes—the painted pictures or *pinakes* within the paintings and the significant details—were executed by the most skilled painters in the local workshop or by artists who were called in from elsewhere. This technical element of fresco painting explains many aspects of Roman wall decoration and especially the fact that objects in the same painting are sometimes presented from different vantage points, even when they are close together. We see it too in the repetition of similar images that are finished differently, as well as in the repetition of secondary decorative elements.

Fresco on the west wall of the *oecus* (43) in the House of the Labyrinth at Pompeii with the principal vanishing points of the painting's orthogonals indicated. Rather than a single vanishing point for all the orthogonals in the picture, we have instead a series of vanishing points along the vertical line that divides the fresco in two. Although the altar in the foreground and the elements around it are constructed orthogonally, they do not adhere to the overall perspective of the central wall itself. This reconstruction was made from a photomontage of the wall published in Strocka (1991).



The Reconstructions

In making these reconstructions we found that although we tried to make the process rigorous and logical, we also had to interpret the painted reality. The first phase required the creation of a line drawing, in pencil, that was a sort of survey of the colored fresco; it would serve as a point of departure for the reconstruction. But because the colors have faded with time and contain some chromatic variations, and because the plaster itself was damaged, we found ourselves even in this first phase having to make a number of interpretations in order to determine some constructive solutions and some of the relationships between elements.

Once we had identified the central view of the perspective and had decided to reconstruct it from a single point of view, we found that, in fact, the majority of the lines effectively receded to—or, more precisely, toward—a single vanishing point. This point was then used to reconstruct the view as a whole. We then tried to restore the various projections of the individual elements in order to reinsert them into the perspective as a whole, in a way that made sense to the eye.

Using computer-aided design software, the space of the painted image was then connected to the real space in which it was located.

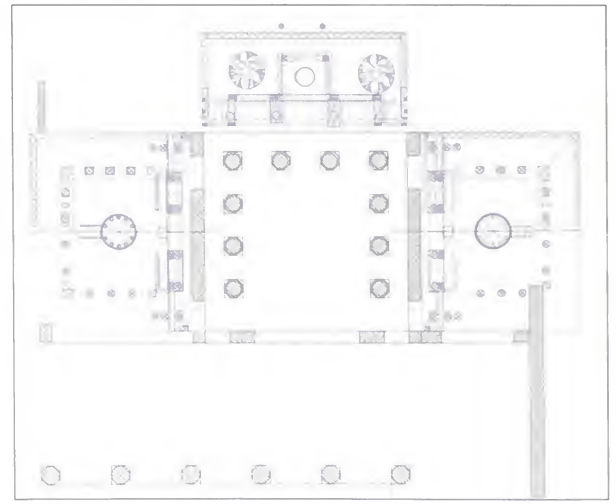
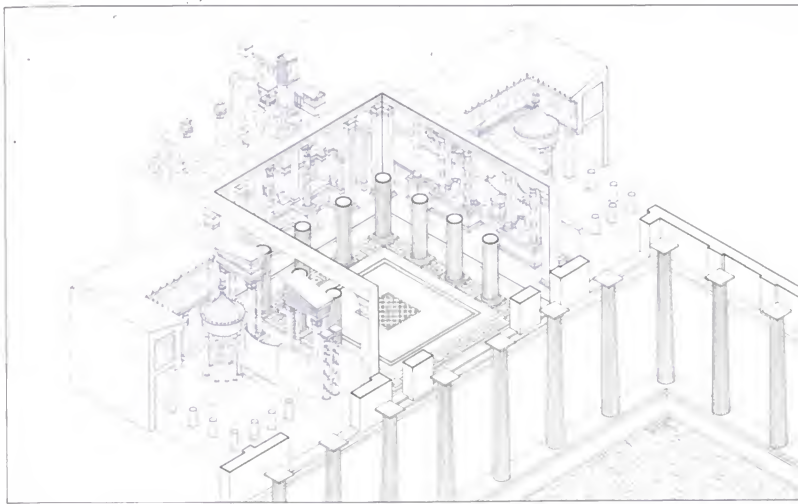
Two of the three reconstructed spaces show different characteristics than the third, so we will treat these perspective constructions in two parts; the first is dedicated to the Villa of Poppea and the House of the Labyrinth and the second to the House of the Ceii.

The Frescoed Walls in Oecus 43 of the House of the Labyrinth at Pompeii and the East Wall in Room 15 of the Villa of Poppea at Oplontis

The first pictures we will discuss are both examples of Second Style decoration.⁶ Second Style wall paintings are characterized by a screen consisting of a more-or-less articulated wall beyond which one can catch a glimpse of another architectural space. The development of these screens from closed structures to something that is increasingly open to the space beyond it has been identified as one of the keys to interpreting the evolution of the Second Style.⁷ Here too, and without getting involved in the specifics of the archaeological debate, we will examine these considerations because they can help us understand the evolution of the relationship between these painted walls and the physical space around them.

The Corinthian *oecus* (43) was one of the most richly decorated spaces in the House of the Labyrinth.⁸ The room was almost square, and on one side it opened onto the peristyle. A narrow passageway ran along the remaining three sides of the room, between the columns that support the coffered vaulting and the painted walls behind them.

The room's north or back wall is divided by a dark socle, a normal feature in Second Style decoration, which separates the painted image from the floor. At the corners of the wall, angular pilaster strips are associated with pilasters that mark out the passageway; these appear to extend the walk-



ways between the columns and the real walls of the room into the painted space. The two lateral pairs, composed of piers and pilasters, support a sort of trabeation that forms the scene's outermost frame. The podium or stylobate behind is divided into three sections by two richly decorated columns; they seem to create a kind of sill between the real and painted spaces. The central part of the podium is deeper than the rest in order to accommodate an altar, while the lateral sections of the wall offer views of a city seen beyond low walls. On the far side of these walls, painted trees and sky open the vista toward the exterior.

The east and west walls of the room are almost perfect mirror images of one another. They are also bounded by a low, dark socle and by half-pilasters that support a delicate trabeation. The columns on the podium are much more richly decorated, and they support a broken tympanum. There are no flanking passageways on these side walls. The low walls behind this screen are transformed, at the center, into a curtain, and beyond it we see a small, circular temple or *tholos*, surrounded by a portico. Farther in the distance we see the sky and the very tops of some trees. The podium in the foreground is littered with amphorae, theater masks, hanging game, and, on one of the two walls, a wild boar ready to be sacrificed.

The upper part of the painting on all three walls was constructed like a central perspective, a vertical picture with a low viewing point, only about a meter (3 ft.) from the floor of the real room. This choice can be explained by the desire to emphasize the central section of the frescoes, whose point of view was the most important in the room. Thus the perspective had to be adjusted to the height of the guests who were seated on dining couches (*triclinia*) at the central area between the three walls. The bases and surface of the stylobates were painted from two different points of view, both of which are lower than the principal view. Yet another perspective construction was used to represent the altar placed in front of the curtains on the east and west walls.

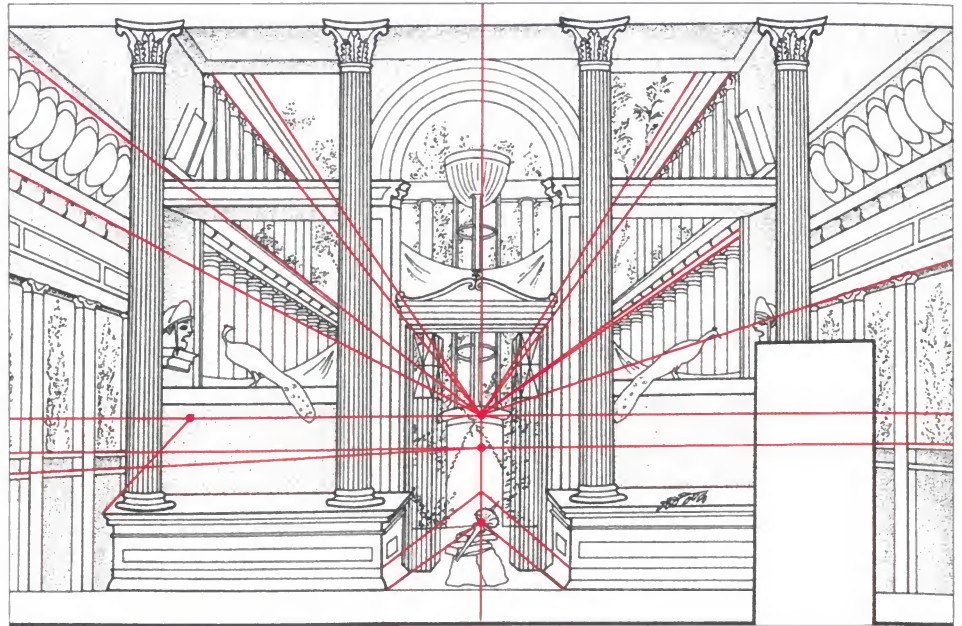
The different vantage point of the podium can likely be explained by the fact that the lower parts of the wall were meant, more than the others, to be approached and seen from up close. This consideration necessitated certain compromises on the part of the artists, making the multiple points of view more acceptable. The construction of individual elements with still more points of view reminds us that the secondary decoration was executed in an almost serial fashion by artisans other than the painters who executed the more important parts of the frescoes.

The reconstruction took into consideration the actual size of the framing elements of the vertical picture; all the other elements were then sized proportionally. The architecture reconstructed outside of the stylobate was based on similar examples in Roman architecture. The small staircases leading up to the *tholoi* were included because they are found in all round temples of the period. The two-storied porticoes enclosing the *tholoi* were constructed according to the rules of proportion of the classical orders. None of this, though, is enough to guarantee a perfect logic in the construction. Moreover, the painting was made in the period when realistic representations of

Left: The virtual spaces obtained by the perspective restoration of the frescoes painted on the walls of the *oecus* (43) in the House of the Labyrinth (drawing by Ludovica Bucci de Santis and Simonetta Capecci). This restoration is based, in part, on the plans and photographs made by P. Grumwald and P. Papagialis and published in Stročka (1991).

Right: Plan of the spaces represented in the frescoes in the *oecus* (43) of the House of the Labyrinth juxtaposed with the plan of the room itself.

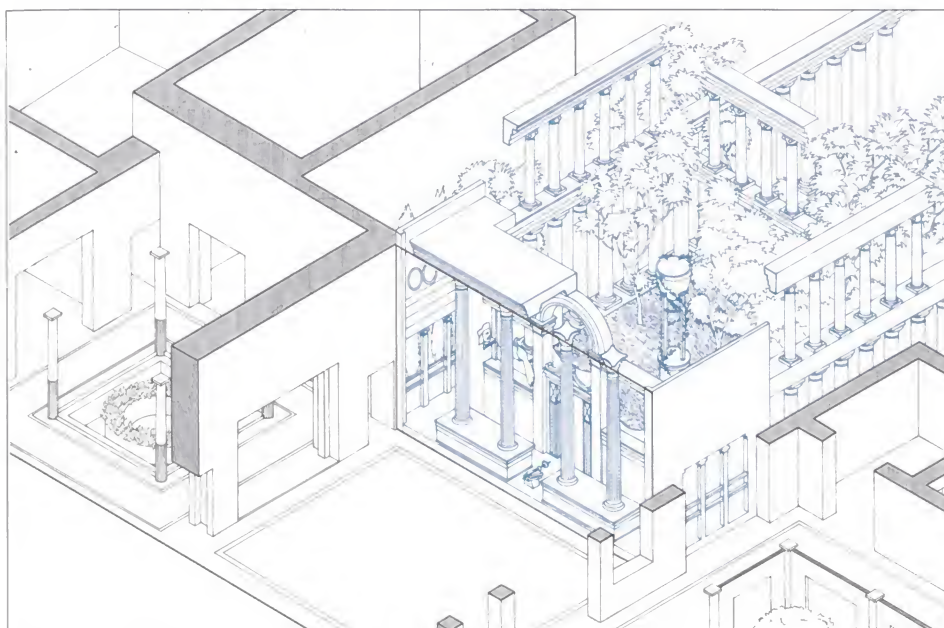
Reproduction of the painted decoration of the *oecus* (15) in the Villa of Poppea at Oplontis, indicating the principal vanishing points of the painting's orthogonals. Here too we have a series of vanishing points along the vertical line that divides the picture in two. The underlying drawing was traced from W. Ehrardt (1991).



architecture were accompanied by more fantastical images—masks, game animals, curtains, doves, the display of lamps at the center of the *tholoi*—elements that came from different worlds and were present, it seems, to please the eye rather than to conform to any coherent simulation of reality.

The fresco on the east wall of Room 15 in the so-called Villa of Poppea at Oplontis is later than the paintings of the Corinthian *oecus* in the House of the Labyrinth, and we approached the general design of this wall along the lines of one described above. In keeping with the evolution of the Second Style, the architectural screen in the foreground of the fresco at Oplontis is much more open toward the exterior than the three walls of the Corinthian *oecus*, and its columns and architraves are much thinner than in the paintings in the House of the Labyrinth. In the latter we found stylobates and curtains or walls, whereas here, at the center of this painting, there is an open gate, an invitation to leave the real space and enter the illusion. Another difference between the two works is in the proportions of the paintings with respect to their surroundings. The fresco in Room 15 of the Villa of Poppea is located in a space about eight by eight meters (26×26 ft.), which had no columns and was covered by a pitched roof. The painting extends almost to the top of the wall itself; it is not only visible but indeed dominates the space around it from almost any point of view.⁹ The Corinthian *oecus* in the House of the Labyrinth, by contrast, is a vaulted room, and the walls are only visible between broad Corinthian columns. The frescoes in the room do not reach the tops of the walls, and the effect is of a rich painted architecture that can be glimpsed rather than seen. It dominates the room only when it is viewed from a fixed vantage point; otherwise it becomes part of an elaborate game of shifting between what is real and what is not. Finally, the vantage point in the Oplontis frescoes is higher than that in the Corinthian *oecus*; it is at about the level of a standing person. Unlike the restricted spaces of the porticoes on the east and west walls of the Corinthian *oecus*, here the architecture that one glimpses behind the screen in the foreground is open and suggests unlimited space beyond the endless colonnade. The sky is the predominant element; blue dominates the entire wall, and it in turn dominates the space it defines.

A sort of shallow loggia is the first element of the painted architecture that divides real from fictive space. It runs parallel to the picture plane and seems to belong to some sort of regal room. Four Corinthian columns stand in pairs on two separate podia, and the back of the loggia consists of another wall also parallel to the picture plane. An arch at the center of this second wall reveals an open door through which one sees the central element of the fresco, a Delphic tripod. Beyond it one can make out an Ionic colonnade that appears slender and unfocused as it blends into the greenery of the sacred wood.



Perspective reconstruction of the fresco in the *oecus* (15) in the Villa of Poppea at Oplontis (drawing by Ludovica Bucci de Santis and Simonetta Capecchi). This reconstruction is based in part on a direct rendering of both the painted wall and the actual spaces and includes an earlier rendering of the fresco published by W. Ehrhardt (1991) and from the plans of the villa published by A. De Franciscis (1973).

Two colonnades of massive and closely spaced Doric columns flank the central fresco; they recede orthogonally into space and seem to lose themselves, finally, in the green background. These colonnades are topped with Ionic colonnades, and they too move toward the central axis of the painting. The four Corinthian columns in the center foreground are more slender than is normal for that order, and yet the stacking of the Doric and Ionic colonnades follows the classical hierarchy of the orders, as does the differentiation in the diameters of their column shafts.

The construction of the composition follows the general principles of one-point perspective—that is, a vertical picture plane that is parallel to the principal side of the space represented. There are at least three vantage points in the work, all of which fall along the central axis of the wall. The first is about 60 centimeters (24 in.) from the ground and corresponds to the lines that define the floor of the illusionistic space. The majority of the straight lines that define the vertical wall run about 150 centimeters (60 in.) from the floor of the room, and a few more lines run along at another slightly higher point. The lines that mark the bases of the Corinthian columns, at the sides in the foreground of the composition, seem entirely independent of the rest of the picture. This is sufficiently striking that one wonders if the overall spatial plan was not somehow lost as the work was executed, or perhaps it was the result of adapting decorative motifs from a variety of sources to fit into the composition.

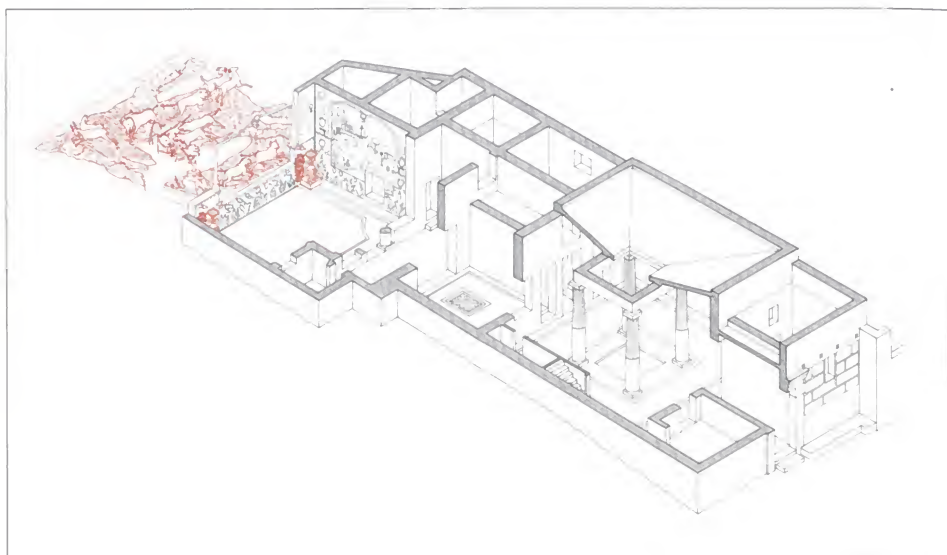
Despite the multiple vantage points, the majority of the orthogonals seem to converge at a single point. For this reason and despite the intuitive corrections, it seems justified to reconstruct the space by merging several vanishing points into one.¹⁰ The perspective reconstruction of the space was created using the diagonals at the bases of the Corinthian columns as the basic unit of measure. As in the previous example, some details, like the bases of the Doric columns—which are not visible in the fresco but can be seen in the reconstruction—were reconstructed according to the proportional system of the orders described by Vitruvius in the third and fourth books of his *De Architectura*.¹¹

The North Wall of the Viridarium in the House of the Ceii at Pompeii

The scene painted on the north wall of the *viridarium* probably dates to the years between the earthquake of A.D. 62 and the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79.¹² Here the architectural screen we found in the other frescoes has disappeared, leaving only a sort of window that opens onto a landscape scene with animals.

The red socle is about a meter (3 ft.) high. There are two pedestals at each end of the wall; they are about two meters (6 ft.) tall and are painted a pretty yellow ochre. These pedestals support the

Three-dimensional rendering of the fresco with the scene of animals hunting animals in the *viridarium* of the House of the Ceii at Pompeii. It is juxtaposed with the succession of the actual interior spaces of the house (drawing by Ludovica Bucci de Santis and Simonetta Capecchi).



lateral parts of the wall, which are also painted red. The socle is decorated with ivy and oleander leaves, and garlands of the same foliage mark the break between the red wall and the landscape beyond it, creating a sense that the wall has the consistency more of drapery than masonry.

Along the red wall, yellow-painted geometrical panels are inserted along the sides and above. Some panels imitate sculpted reliefs of weapons, helmets and shields; others on the lower part of the lateral pedestals show paintings of priestesses and winged female figures, and on both the left and the right a winged sphinx holds a large metal container. All these decorative elements are more “real” in photographs and written descriptions than they are on the actual walls and in the actual paintings.¹³

The window that opens onto the scene of animals has physically very little depth to it, but it nonetheless works very well in separating the spaces of the painted representation and the spectator. The landscape with animals is itself divided into two parts, which are characterized by different intensities of color and differing proportional relationships. Darker tones are the rule below, while lighter tones were used above; the latter also appear in the landscapes painted on the lateral walls of the *viridarium*, which are also framed as if we are viewing them through a window. Here the depth of space is suggested not by any geometrical construction but rather by the haziness of the colors, a technique of rendering depth that is related to aerial perspective. In this kind of representation, color becomes less distinct the farther away an object is meant to be because of the increasing density of the atmosphere—the humidity and dust—that gathers between viewer and object. Here too a mathematical system can explain the visual phenomenon, but more often the blurring colors were simply applied intuitively.

It is interesting to note that the upper scene is about twice as tall as the lower one and that it begins at a seam in the plaster itself. Once again the expressive characteristics of the image are tied to the practicalities of its creation.

In the lower scene with its darker colors, a lion in the foreground is stalking a bull. They are placed in a valley that has a stream running between sharp dark rocks. The blue of the water, like the other colors in the scene, is very intense. The animals are represented in profile, although the bull turns his muzzle toward the viewer; both are extremely sculptural because of the subtle gradations of color, ranging from dark brown to yellow. The forms themselves are defined in dark brown, and the warmer tones, which tend toward yellow, highlight the curves in the bodies of the two animals.

The animals above the stream are smaller and lighter. At the center a pair of dogs attacks a wild boar. The bodies of the two predators are parallel to the picture plane while the boar is placed on a diagonal, its head toward the dog in the foreground. Within the composition as a whole, the place-

ment of the boar is the only thing beyond the colors that gives any suggestion of depth. Two small groups of three animals each are arrayed on the left and right sides of the scene, and each group is painted almost exactly parallel to the picture plane. To the right a leopard stalks a pair of mountain goats and to the left a boar trails two deer.

The two parts of the fresco described here seem almost independent of one another, although at the sides a few vertical elements seem to reconnect the two. On the left, for example, there is a sort of circular construction with five narrow oval openings and on the right an outcropping of rocks.¹⁴

The spatial reconstruction of this fresco was certainly the most difficult of the three. The window in the wall was drawn according to its real dimensions, and we tried to retain the sense of its being a curtain between the viewer and the landscape with the animals. We had very little to go on in determining how to place the solid objects within the space of the scene. The animals were all rendered on the same scale, without regard for the proportions of the painting itself. Perhaps this was meant to underscore the idea that seems to be at work here, that of adding elements rather than creating a sense of compositional hierarchy among them.

The Use of Isometric Axonometry in Making the Reconstructions

Once the reconstructions of the three frescoes described above were completed, it became necessary both to connect them to the spaces in which the paintings reside and to find the best way to express that connection. The evolution of wall painting coincided with the evolution of its relationship with the space it decorated; Pompeian painting originally mimicked masonry and then came to deny the existence of that masonry. This negation became increasingly evident as wall painting moved away from representing definite architectural spaces. Its images became ever more dream-like and independent of the space that underlay them, and, paradoxically, it is precisely this relationship between the paintings and the space that makes them interesting from an architectural point of view.

This raises the problem of what technique can best be used to represent this space, which is the summation of what is real and what is virtual. The same representational technique must obviously be used to render both the real and the illusionistic space in order that we may read the similarities and differences between them. At the same time, since one of the purposes of this study is to investigate the relationship between real and imaginary space, it becomes necessary to treat each of them on its own terms.

For these reasons we decided to make three drawings using the technique of isometric axonometry—that is, to represent the painted walls like pieces of glass through which the real and imaginary spaces come into contact. This decision does, however, represent a further interpretation of reality, and it tends to coax the reader toward the information that we find most interesting.

Perspective is, by definition, tied to the view of the person drawing it. Axonometry, on the other hand, is a geometric and graphical technique that offers the pretext of “objectivity” because it represents what the artist left out. It is not by chance that axonometry was taught in engineering schools, beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, and that it quickly came to be linked to the challenges of industrial production. When axonometry began to be used for architectural representations, in the 1920s, it was used to dissect architectural spaces, as a mechanism for dismantling and understanding them. Axonometry is useful because it is a system of projection in which an object, no matter how far away, maintains the integrity of its measurements without regard to either its position in space or the position of the viewer. From a practical standpoint, the legibility of the coefficients of reduction used in axonometry makes it easy to understand what is represented, especially when that coefficient is unique as it is in isometric axonometry.

Axonometry is a type of abstract representation in that it offers views of images that are in fact impossible for the human eye to capture. It thus also preserves a strong degree of immediacy and legibility, even for the untrained viewer. Auguste Choisy, a French archaeologist at the end of the nineteenth century who made great use of this technique of representation, said that axonometry is “a system which has clarity of perspective and offers immediate measurements. In this system, a single animated image, like the building itself, substitutes for the fractured

representation of ground plans, elevations and views.”¹⁵ In much the same way, we felt that isometric axonometry might be useful in our own experiment, to help identify the rules for representing an illusion and eliminating the differences between real space and fantastical space.

Notes

- 1 Obviously here we are referring to elementary photogrammetry, that is, a method of restoring the measurements of an object from a single photograph. True photogrammetry, that is, stereo-photogrammetry, is much more complicated—although it follows the same logic—and requires at least two representations of the same object. See Mario Docci and Diego Maestri, *Il rilevamento architettonico. Storia, metodi e disegno* (Rome and Bari, 1989), chap. 4.
- 2 Photographic documentation reveals how many significant details have been lost with the passage of time. In the House of the Labyrinth, now indefinitely closed to the public, its Corinthian *oecus* has essentially disappeared, and perhaps more importantly the painting on the north wall of the House of the Ceii has deteriorated drastically since the photographs published in 1990 in Dorothea Michel’s monographic volume on this building. Furthermore, the 1990 photographs reveal how much had been lost before; we need only compare them to the 1916 photograph also published in Michel’s book; see Dorothea Michel, *Casa dei Ceii* (I, 6, 15) (Munich, 1990). This underscores how important it is to study and catalogue these images as a means of preserving the patrimony of Pompeian painting. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the series, *Häuser in Pompeii*, published under the auspices of the German Archaeological Institute, with the guidance of Volker Michael Strocka. The volumes dedicated to the House of the Labyrinth and the House of the Ceii were fundamental sources for this essay and the graphic reconstructions it contains.
- 3 In eighteenth-century France the best students of the Académie Royale d’Architecture—and in the nineteenth those of the École des Beaux Arts—were given a stipend to attend the Villa Medici in Rome and study the city’s antiquities. Every year, each student was required to complete a survey of an ancient monument. First they measured it and carefully recorded its remains in drawings. Then, working as logically as they could, they would reconstruct the missing elements and finally draw the building as they believed it looked when it was first erected. The results were sent back to Paris. See Annie Jacques and Riichi Miyake, *Les Dessins d’architecture de l’École des Beaux Arts* (Paris, 1988), pp. 112–15.
- 4 The perspective used in Roman painting is still the subject of much debate. Erwin Panofsky suggested in a 1927 essay that the Romans used an “angle-perspectival” system to create space in which every point was projected in pairs on a curved surface to create a “fishbone” effect. Panofsky rejected the notion that Roman artists used what we consider to be canonical perspective because its development and codification in the Renaissance can be traced to an anthropocentric vision of the world that was peculiar to that period and would have been foreign to the Romans. See Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Christopher S. Wood, trans. (New York, 1991), pp. 37–45.
Other scholars believe that the Romans were capable of a correctly constructed linear perspective. See especially Hendrik G. Beyen, “Die antike Zentralperspektive,” *Archäologischer Anzeiger des Jahrbuchs des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, 1939 and Decio Gioseffi, *Perspectiva artificialis—Per la storia della prospettiva—spigolature e appunti* (Trieste, 1957). The latter position is confirmed both by the frescoes described below and by the discovery of a painted wall in the Stanza delle Maschere on the Palatine Hill, which is constructed using a rigorous perspectival system. See Daniela Scagliarini Corlàita, “Spazio e decorazione nella pittura pompeiana,” *Palladio* 23–25 (1974/76): 32, n. 29.
- 5 Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, trans. by Morris Hicky Morgan (New York, 1960), 14. Vitruvius’s book, written between 30 and 20 B.C., is the only technical treatise on architecture that survives from antiquity. After having been used by ancient architects, the treatise was rediscovered in the Renaissance but without any of its original illustrations. It served as inspiration for all the treatises written in the period, from Leon Battista Alberti to Palladio. For more, see Pierre Gros’s edition of Vitruvius published by Einaudi in 1997.
- 6 Despite the many critical revisions it has been subjected to, we will use this definition of the Second Style derived from August Mau’s late-nineteenth-century categorization. Every system of organization or categorization is an expression of the culture that produced it and hence they are subject to revision. Nonetheless, Mau’s definition is still useful since our task here is not to offer a specialist’s archaeological

analysis but rather an architect's reading of how a sense of architectural space is enriched by the paintings on its walls.

- 7 See Hendrik G. Beyen, *Die pompejanische Wanddekoration vom zweiten bis zum vierten Stil* (The Hague, vol. 1, 1938; vol. 2, 1960), and Scagliarini Corlàita cited in n. 4 above.
- 8 For an exact description of both the architecture and decoration of the House of the Labyrinth, see Volker Michael Stročka, *La Casa del Labirinto* (VI, 11, 8–10) (Munich, 1991) and “Il secondo stile,” in *La Pittura di Pompei, testimonianze dell’arte romana nella zona sepolta dal Vesuvio nel 79 d.C.* (Milan, 1991). The terms and numbers we have used to identify regions as well as the specific areas of Pompeian houses and the Villa at Oplontis follow the system widely employed in the current archaeological literature.
- 9 Systematic excavations at the Villa at Oplontis only began in 1967 under the direction of Alfonso De Franciscis. Room 15 was found at the edge of a street in Torre Annunziata, and it was only partially excavated. See Alfonso De Franciscis, “La Villa romana di Oplontis,” *La parola del passato* 153 (1973), Wolfgang Ehrhardt, “Bild und Ausblick in Wandbemalungen,” *Antik* 34 (1991), and Pier Giovanni Guzzo and Lorenzo Fergola, *Oplontis. La villa di Poppea* (Milan, 2000).
- 10 In a perspective rendering, all orthogonal lines on the picture plane converge at a single vanishing point. Here, all orthogonal lines on the picture plane in the lower part of the painting converge at a single point, and most of the other orthogonals converge at another, somewhat higher point.
- 11 See Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, Books 3 and 4. The third book is dedicated to the Ionic order, and the fourth to the Doric, Tuscan, and Corinthian, each of which is defined by what differentiates it from the Ionic order.
- 12 Thus according to Mau's system, this fresco was executed during the time of the Fourth Style. See Giuseppina Cerulli Irelli, “L'ultimo stile pompeiano,” in *La Pittura di Pompei, testimonianze dell’arte romana nella zona sepolta dal Vesuvio nel 79 d.C.* (Milan, 1991).
- 13 *Ibid.*, 55–57.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 56. This construction is defined as a variation of a *schola*, which in Roman painting was generally a semicircular exedra that enclosed something sacred, always in relation to a tree. This type is rooted in constructions common in the Hellenistic East.
- 15 See Auguste Choisy, *Histoire de l’architecture*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1899). Auguste Choisy was a French engineer and archaeologist working at the end of the nineteenth century. He systematically used axonometry to make architectural renderings, and his *Histoire de l’architecture* is famous for the approximately 2,000 small axonometric illustrations drawn with the building's plan in the foreground. For Choisy's graphic technique, see Ludovica Bucci de Santis, “1899. *L’Histoire de l’architecture* di Auguste Choisy. Il disegno come sistematizzazione della storia,” doctoral thesis (Naples, 1995).

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Appendix: "On the Reconstruction of Spatial Representations in Certain Roman Wall Paintings," by Ludovica Bucci de Santis

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